THE TEMPLE EDITION

OF THE

COMÉDIE HUMAINE

Edited by

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

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AT THE SIGN OF THE CAT & RACKET

(LA MAISON DU CHAT-QUI-PELOTE)

BY

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PREFACE

In the very interesting preface, dated July 1842, which Balzac prefixed to the first collection of the *Comédie Humaine*, he endeavours, naturally enough, to represent the division into *Scènes de la Vie Parisienne*, etc., as a rational and reasoned one. Although not quite arbitrary, it was of course to a great extent determined by considerations which were not those of design; and we did not require the positive testimony which we find in the Letters to tell us that in the author's view, as well as in our own, not a few of the stories might have been shifted over from one division to another, and have filled their place just as well in the other as in the one.

'La Maison du Chat-qui-Pelote,' however, which originally bore the much less happy title of 'Gloire et Malheur,' was a *Scène de la Vie Privée* from the first, and it bears out better than some of its companions its author's expressed intention of making these 'scenes' represent youth, whether Parisian or Provincial. Few of Balzac's stories have united the general suffrage for touching grace more than this; and there are few better examples of his minute Dutch-painting than the opening passages, or of his unconquerable delight in the details of business than his sketch of Monsieur Guillaume's establishment and its ways. The French equivalent of the 'Complete

Tradesman' of Defoe lasted much longer than his English counterpart; but, except in the smaller provincial towns, he is said to be uncommon now. As for the plot, if such a stately name can be given to so delicate a sketch, it is of course open to downright British judgment to pronounce the self-sacrifice of Lebas more ignoble than touching, the conduct of Théodore too childish to deserve the excuses sometimes possible for passionate inconstancy, and the character of Augustine angelically idiotic. This last outrage, if it were committed, would indeed only be an instance of the irreconcilable difference which almost to the present day divides English and French ideas of ideally perfect girlhood, and of that state of womanhood which corresponds thereto. The *candeur adorable* which the Frenchman adores and exhibits in the girl; the uncompromising, though mortal, passion of the woman; are too different from any ideal that we have entertained, except for a very short period in the eighteenth century. But there are few more pathetic and charming impersonations of this other ideal than Augustine de Sommervieux.

All the stories associated with 'La Maison du Chat-qui-Pelote,' according to French standards—all, perhaps, according to all but the very strictest and oldest-fashioned of English—are perfectly free from the slightest objection on the score of that propriety against which Balzac has an amusing if not quite exact tirade in one of his books. And this is evidently not accidental, for the preface above referred to is an elaborate attempt to rebut the charge of *im*propriety, and to show that the author could draw virtuous as well as unvirtuous characters. But they are not, taking them as a whole, and omitting the 'Cat and

Racket' itself, quite examples of putting the best foot foremost. 'Le Bal de Sceaux,' with its satire on contempt for trade, is in some ways more like Balzac's young friend and pupil Charles de Bernard than like himself; and I believe it attracted English notice pretty early. At least I seem, when quite a boy, and long before I read the *Comédie Humaine*, to have seen an English version or paraphrase of it. 'La Bourse,' though agreeable, is a little slight; and 'La Vendetta' might have been written on so well known a *donnée* by many persons besides Balzac. It happens, moreover, to contrast most unfortunately with the terrible and exquisite perfection of Mérimée's 'Mateo Falcone.' I should rank 'Madame Firmiani' a good deal higher than any of these three, though it too is a little slight, and though it is not in Balzac's most characteristic or important manner. Rather, perhaps, does it remind us of the 'Physiologies' and the other social 'skits' and sketches which he was writing for the *Caricature* and other papers at the time. Still, the various descriptions of the heroine have a point and sparkle which are almost peculiar to the not quite mature work of men of genius; and the actual story has a lightness which, perhaps, would have disappeared if Balzac had handled it at greater length.

As for bibliography, the 'Avant-Propos' (of which Momus may perhaps say that it is both a little too discursive and a little too apologetic) dates itself. I do not know whether there may be any interest for some readers in the fact that it originally appeared not in the *first*, but in the *last* 'livraison' of the first volume of the complete edition of the *Comédie*. 'La Maison du Chat-qui-Pelote,' under the title above referred to, saw the light first

with other *Scènes de la Vie Privée* in 1830. But it was not dated as of the previous year till five years later, in its third edition; while the title was not changed till the great collection itself. Of its companions, 'Le Bal de Sceaux' was an original one, and seems to have been written as well as published more or less at the same time. It at first had an alternative title, 'Ou le Pair de France,' which was afterwards dropped.

'La Bourse' was early, but not quite so early as these. It appeared in, and was apparently written for, the second edition of the *Scènes de la Vie Privée*, published in May 1832. In 1835 it was moved over to the *Scènes de la Vie Parisienne*, between which and the *Vie Privée* there is in fact a good deal of cross and arbitrary division. But when the full *Comédie* took shape it moved back again.

'La Vendetta' ranked from the first edition of these *Scènes* with them; but, unlike those previously mentioned, it had had an earlier separate publication in part. For it is one of those stories which Balzac originally divided into chapters and afterwards printed without them. The first of these, which appeared in the *Silhouette* of April 1830, was entitled 'L'Atelier,' and the others were 'La Désobéissance,' 'Le Mariage,' and 'Le Châtiment.'

'Madame Firmiani' was first published in the *Revue de Paris* for February 1832; then became a *Conte Philosophique*, and still in the same year a *Scène de la Vie Parisienne*. It was in the 1842 collection that it took up its abode in the *Scènes de la Vie Privée*.

G. S.

INTRODUCTION

In giving the general title of 'The Human Comedy' to a work begun nearly thirteen years since, it is necessary to explain its motive, to relate its origin, and briefly sketch its plan, while endeavouring to speak of these matters as though I had no personal interest in them. This is not so difficult as the public might imagine. Few works conduce to much vanity; much labour conduces to great diffidence. This observation accounts for the study of their own works made by Corneille, Molière, and other great writers; if it is impossible to equal them in their fine conceptions, we may try to imitate them in this feeling.

The idea of *The Human Comedy* was at first as a dream to me, one of those impossible projects which we caress and then let fly; a chimera that gives us a glimpse of its smiling woman's face, and forthwith spreads its wings and returns to a heavenly realm of phantasy. But this chimera, like many another, has become a reality; has its behests, its tyranny, which must be obeyed.

The idea originated in a comparison between Humanity and Animality.

It is a mistake to suppose that the great dispute which has lately made a stir, between Cuvier and Geoffroi Saint-Hilaire, arose from a scientific innovation. Unity of structure, under other names, had occupied the greatest minds during the two previous centuries. As we read the extraordinary writings of the mystics who studied the sciences in their relation to infinity, such as Swedenborg, Saint-Martin, and others, and the works of the greatest authors on Natural History—Leibnitz, Buffon,

Charles Bonnet, etc., we detect in the *monads* of Leibnitz, in the *organic molecules* of Buffon, in the *vegetative force* of Needham, in the correlation of similar organs of Charles Bonnet—who in 1760 was so bold as to write, 'Animals vegetate as plants do'—we detect, I say, the rudiments of the great law of Self for Self, which lies at the root of *Unity of Plan.* There is but one Animal. The Creator works on a single model for every organised being. 'The Animal' is elementary, and takes its external form, or, to be accurate, the differences in its form, from the environment in which it is obliged to develop. Zoological species are the result of these differences. The announcement and defence of this system, which is indeed in harmony with our preconceived ideas of Divine Power, will be the eternal glory of Geoffroi Saint-Hilaire, Cuvier's victorious opponent on this point of higher science, whose triumph was hailed by Goethe in the last article he wrote.

I, for my part, convinced of this scheme of nature long before the disucssion to which it has given rise, perceived that in this respect society resembled nature. For does not society modify Man, according to the conditions in which he lives and acts, into men as manifold as the species in Zoology? The differences between a soldier, an artisan, a man of business, a lawyer, an idler, a student, a statesman, a merchant, a sailor, a poet, a beggar, a priest, are as great, though not so easy to define, as those between the wolf, the lion, the ass, the crow, the shark, the seal, the sheep, etc. Thus social species have always existed, and will always exist, just as there are zoological species. If Buffon could produce a magnificent work by attempting to represent in a book the whole realm of zoology, was there not room for a work of the same kind on society? But the limits set by nature to the variations of animals have no existence in society. When Buffon describes the lion, he dismisses the lioness with a few phrases; but in society a wife is

not always the female of the male. There may be two perfectly dissimilar beings in one household. The wife of a shopkeeper is sometimes worthy of a prince, and the wife of a prince is often worthless compared with the wife of an artisan. The social state has freaks which Nature does not allow herself; it is nature *plus* society. The description of social species would thus be at least double that of animal species, merely in view of the two sexes. Then, among animals the drama is limited; there is scarcely any confusion; they turn and rend each other —that is all. Men, too, rend each other; but their greater or less intelligence makes the struggle far more complicated. Though some savants do not yet admit that the animal nature flows into human nature through an immense tide of life, the grocer certainly becomes a peer, and the noble sometimes sinks to the lowest social grade. Again, Buffon found that life was extremely simple among animals. Animals have little property, and neither arts nor sciences; while man, by a law that has yet to be sought, has a tendency to express his culture, his thoughts, and his life in everything he appropriates to his use. Though Leuwenhoek, Swammerdam, Spallanzani, Réaumur, Charles Bonnet, Müller, Haller, and other patient investigators have shown us how interesting are the habits of animals, those of each kind are, at least to our eyes, always and in every age alike; whereas the dress, the manners, the speech, the dwelling of a prince, a banker, an artist, a citizen, a priest, and a pauper are absolutely unlike, and change with every phase of civilisation.

Hence the work to be written needed a threefold form —men, women, and things; that is to say, persons and the material expression of their minds; man, in short, and life.

As we read the dry and discouraging list of events called History, who can have failed to note that the writers of all periods, in Egypt, Persia, Greece, and

Rome, have forgotten to give us the history of manners? The fragment of Petronius on the private life of the Romans excites rather than satisfies our curiosity. It was from observing this great void n the field of history that the Abbé Barthélemy devoted his life to a reconstruction of Greek manners in *Le Jeune Anacharsis*.

But how could such a drama, with the four or five thousand persons which a society offers, be made interesting? How, at the same time, please the poet, the philosopher, and the masses who want both poetry and philosophy under striking imagery? Though I could conceive of the importance and of the poetry of such a history of the human heart, I saw no way of writing it; for hitherto the most famous story-tellers had spent their talent in creating two or three typical actors, in depicting one aspect of life. It was with this idea that I read the works of Walter Scott. Walter Scott, the modern troubadour, or finder (*trouvère=trouveur*), had just then given an aspect of grandeur to a class of composition unjustly regarded as of the second rank. Is it not really more difficult to compete with personal and parochial interests by writing of Daphnis and Chloe, Roland, Amadis, Panurge, Don Quixote, Manon Lescaut, Clarissa, Lovelace, Robinson Crusoe, Gil Blas, Ossian, Julie d'Etanges, My Uncle Toby, Werther, Corinne, Adolphe, Paul and Virginia, Jeanie Deans, Claverhouse, Ivanhoe, Manfred, Mignon, than to set forth in order facts more or less similar in every country, to investigate the spirit of laws that have fallen into desuetude, to review the theories which mislead nations, or, like some metaphysicians, to explain what *Is*? In the first place, these actors, whose existence becomes more prolonged and more authentic than that of the generations which saw their birth, almost always live solely on condition of their being a vast reflection of the present. Conceived in the womb of their own period, the whole heart of humanity stirs within their frame, which often covers a complete

system of philosophy. Thus Walter Scott raised to the dignity of the philosophy of History the literature which, from age to age, sets perennial gems in the poetic crown of every nation where letters are cultivated. He vivified it with the spirit of the past; he combined drama, dialogue, portrait, scenery, and description; he fused the marvellous with truth—the two elements of the times; and he brought poetry into close contact with the familiarity of the humblest speech. But as he had not so much devised a system as hit upon a manner in the ardour of his work, or as its logical outcome, he never thought of connecting his compositions in such a way as to form a complete history of which each chapter was a novel, and each novel the picture of a period.

It was by discerning this lack of unity, which in no way detracts from the Scottish writer's greatness, that I perceived at once the scheme which would favour the execution of my purpose, and the possibility of executing it. Though dazzled, so to speak, by Walter Scott's amazing fertility, always himself and always original, I did not despair, for I found the source of his genius in the infinite variety of human nature. Chance is the greatest romancer in the world; we have only to study it. French society would be the real author; I should only be the secretary. By drawing up an inventory of vices and virtues, by collecting the chief facts of the passions, by depicting characters, by choosing the principal incidents of social life, by composing types out of a combination of homogeneous characteristics, I might perhaps succeed in writing the history which so many historians have neglected: that of Manners. By patience and perseverance I might produce for France in the nineteenth century the book which we must all regret that Rome, Athens, Tyre, Memphis, Persia, and India have not bequeathed to us; that history of their social life which, prompted by the Abbé Barthélemy, Monteil patiently and steadily tried to write for the middle ages, but in an unattractive form.

The work, so far, was nothing. By adhering to the strict lines of a reproduction a writer might be a more or less faithful, and more or less successful painter of types of humanity, a narrator of the dramas of private life, an archæologist of social furniture, a cataloguer of professions, a registrar of good and evil; but to deserve the praise of which every artist must be ambitious, must I not also investigate the reasons or the cause of these social effects, detect the hidden sense of this vast assembly of figures, passions, and incidents? And finally, having sought—I will not say having found—this reason, this motive power, must I not reflect on first principles, and discover in what particulars societies approach or deviate from the eternal law of truth and beauty? In spite of the wide scope of the preliminaries, which might of themselves constitute a book, the work, to be complete, would need a conclusion. Thus depicted, society ought to bear in itself the reason of its working.

The law of the writer, in virtue of which he is a writer, and which I do not hesitate to say makes him the equal, or perhaps the superior, of the statesman, is his judgment, whatever it may be, on human affairs, and his absolute devotion to certain principles. Machiavelli, Hobbes, Bossuet, Leibnitz, Kant, Montesquieu *are* the science which statesmen apply. 'A writer ought to have settled opinions on morals and politics; he should regard himself as a tutor of men; for men need no masters to teach them to doubt,' says Bonald. I took these noble words as my guide long ago; they are the written law of the monarchical writer. And those who would confute me by my own words will find that they have misinterpreted some ironical phrase, or that they have turned against me a speech given to one of my actors—a trick peculiar to calumniators.

As to the intimate purpose, the soul of this work, these are the principles on which it is based.

Man is neither good nor bad; he is born with instincts

and capabilities; society, far from depraving him, as Rousseau asserts, improves him, makes him better; but self-interest also developes his evil tendencies. Christianity, above all, Catholicism, being—as I have pointed out in the Country Doctor (*le Médecin de Campagne*)—a complete system for the repression of the depraved tendencies of man, is the most powerful element of social order.

In reading attentively the presentment of society cast, as it were, from the life, with all that is good and all that is bad in it, we learn this lesson—if thought, or if passion, which combines thought and feeling, is the vital social element, it is also its destructive element. In this respect social life is like the life of man. Nations live long only by moderating their vital energy. Teaching, or rather education, by religious bodies is the grand principle of life for nations, the only means for diminishing the sum of evil and increasing the sum of good in all society. Thought, the living principle of good and ill, can only be trained, quelled, and guided by religion. The only possible religion is Christianity (see the letter from Paris in 'Louis Lambert,' in which the young mystic explains, à propos to Swedenborg's doctrines, how there has never been but one religion since the world began). Christianity created modern nationalities, and it will preserve them. Hence, no doubt, the necessity for the monarchical principle. Catholicism and Royalty are twin principles.

As to the limits within which these two principles should be confined by various institutions, so that they may not become absolute, every one will feel that a brief preface ought not to be a political treatise. I cannot, therefore, enter on religious discussions, nor on the political discussions of the day. I write under the light of two eternal truths—Religion and Monarchy; two necessities, as they are shown to be by contemporary events, towards which every writer of sound sense ought to try to guide the country back. Without being an enemy to election, which is an excellent principle as a

basis of legislation, I reject election regarded as *the only social instrument*, especially so badly organised as it now is (1842); for it fails to represent imposing minorities, whose ideas and interests would occupy the attention of a monarchical government. Elective power extended to all gives us government by the masses, the only irresponsible form of government, under which tyranny is unlimited, for it calls itself law. Besides, I regard the family and not the individual as the true social unit. In this respect, at the risk of being thought retrograde, I side with Bossuet and Bonald instead of going with modern innovators. Since election has become the only social instrument, if I myself were to exercise it no contradiction between my acts and my words should be inferred. An engineer points out that a bridge is about to fall, that it is dangerous for any one to cross it; but he crosses it himself when it is the only road to the town. Napoleon adapted election to the spirit of the French nation with wonderful skill. The least important members of his Legislative Body became the most famous orators of the Chamber after the Restoration. No Chamber has ever been the equal of the *Corps Législatif*, comparing them man for man. The elective system of the Empire was, then, indisputably the best.

Some persons may, perhaps, think that this declaration is somewhat autocratic and self-assertive. They will quarrel with the novelist for wanting to be an historian, and will call him to account for writing politics. I am simply fulfilling an obligation—that is my reply. The work I have undertaken will be as long as a history; I was compelled to explain the logic of it, hitherto unrevealed, and its principles and moral purpose.

Having been obliged to withdraw the prefaces formerly published, in response to essentially ephemeral criticisms, I will retain only one remark.

Writers who have a purpose in view, were it only a reversion to principles familiar in the past because they

are eternal, should always clear the ground. Now every one who, in the domain of ideas, brings his stone by pointing out an abuse, or setting a mark on some evil that it may be removed—every such man is stigmatised as immoral. The accusation of immorality, which has never failed to be cast at the courageous writer, is, after all, the last that can be brought when nothing else remains to be said to a romancer. If you are truthful in your pictures; if by dint of daily and nightly toil you succeed in writing the most difficult language in the world, the word *immoral* is flung in your teeth. Socrates was immoral; Jesus Christ was immoral; they both were persecuted in the name of the society they overset or reformed. When a man is to be killed he is taxed with immorality. These tactics, familiar in party warfare, are a disgrace to those who use them. Luther and Calvin knew well what they were about when they shielded themselves behind damaged worldly interests! And they lived all the days of their life.

When depicting all society, sketching it in the immensity of its turmoil, it happened—it could not but happen—that the picture displayed more of evil than of good; that some part of the fresco represented a guilty couple; and the critics at once raised the cry of immorality, without pointing out the morality of another portion intended to be a perfect contrast. As the critic knew nothing of the general plan I could forgive him, all the more because one can no more hinder criticism than the use of eyes, tongues, and judgment. Also the time for an impartial verdict is not yet come for me. And, after all, the author who cannot make up his mind to face the fire of criticism should no more think of writing than a traveller should start on his journey counting on a perpetually clear sky. On this point it remains to be said that the most conscientious moralists doubt greatly whether society can show as many good actions as bad ones; and in the picture I have painted of it there are more virtuous figures

than reprehensible ones. Blameworthy actions, faults and crimes, from the lightest to the most atrocious, always meet with punishment, human or divine, signal or secret. I have done better than the historian, for I am free. Cromwell here on earth escaped all punishment but that inflicted by thoughtful men. And on this point there have been divided schools. Bossuet even showed some consideration for the great regicide. William of Orange, the usurper, Hugues Capet, another usurper, lived to old age with no more qualms or fears than Henri IV. or Charles I. The lives of Catherine II. and of Frederic of Prussia would be conclusive against any kind of moral law, if they were judged by the twofold aspect of the morality which guides ordinary mortals, and that which is in use by crowned heads; for, as Napoleon said, for kings and statesmen there are the lesser and the higher morality. My scenes of political life are founded on this profound observation. It is not a law to history, as it is to romance, to make for a beautiful ideal. History is, or ought to be, what it was; while romance ought to be 'the better world,' as was said by Mme. Necker, one of the most distinguished thinkers of the last century.

Still, with this noble falsity, romance would be nothing if it were not true in detail. Walter Scott, obliged as he was to conform to the ideas of an essentially hypocritical nation, was false to humanity in his picture of woman, because his models were schismatics. The Protestant woman has no ideal. She may be chaste, pure, virtuous; but her unexpansive love will always be as calm and methodical as the fulfilment of a duty. It might seem as though the Virgin Mary had chilled the hearts of those sophists who have banished her from heaven with her treasures of lovingkindness. In Protestantism there is no possible future for the woman who has sinned; while, in the Catholic Church, the hope of forgiveness makes her sublime. Hence, for the Protestant writer there is but one Woman, while the Catholic writer finds a new

woman in each new situation. If Walter Scott had been a Catholic, if he had set himself the task of describing truly the various phases of society which have successively existed in Scotland, perhaps the painter of Effie and Alice —the two figures for which he blamed himself in his later years—might have admitted passion with its sins and punishments, and the virtues revealed by repentance. Passion is the sum-total of humanity. Without passion, religion, history, romance, art, would all be useless.

Some persons, seeing me collect such a mass of facts and paint them as they are, with passion for their motive power, have supposed, but wrongly, that I must belong to the school of Sensualism and Materialism—two aspects of the same thing—Pantheism. But their misapprehension was perhaps justified—or inevitable. I do not share the belief in indefinite progress for society as a whole; I believe in man's improvement in himself. Those who insist on reading in me the intention to consider man as a finished creation are strangely mistaken. *Séraphita*, the doctrine in action of the Christian Buddha, seems to me an ample answer to this rather heedless accusation.

In certain fragments of this long work I have tried to popularise the amazing facts, I may say the marvels of electricity, which in man is metamorphosed into an incalculable force; but in what way do the phenomena of brain and nerves, which prove the existence of an undiscovered world of psychology, modify the necessary and undoubted relations of the worlds to God? In what way can they shake the Catholic dogma? Though irrefutable facts should some day place thought in the class of fluids which are discerned only by their effects while their substance evades our senses, even when aided by so many mechanical means, the result will be the same as when Christopher Columbus detected that the earth is a sphere, and Galileo demonstrated its rotation. Our future will be unchanged. The wonders of animal magnetism, with which I have been familiar since 1820; the beautiful

experiments of Gall, Lavater's successor; all the men who have studied mind as opticians have studied light—two not dissimilar things—point to a conclusion in favour of the mystics, the disciples of St. John, and of those great thinkers who have established the spiritual world—the sphere in which are revealed the relations of God and man.

A sure grasp of the purport of this work will make it clear that I attach to common, daily facts, hidden or patent to the eye, to the acts of individual lives, and to their causes and principles, the importance which historians have hitherto ascribed to the events of public national life. The unknown struggle which goes on in a valley of the Indre between Mme. de Mortsauf and her passion is perhaps as great as the most famous of battles (*Le Lys dans la Vallée*). In one the glory of the victor is at stake; in the other it is heaven. The misfortunes of the two Birotteaus, the priest and the perfumer, to me are those of mankind. La Fosseuse (*Médecin de Campagne*) and Mme. Graslin (*Curé de Village*) are almost the sum-total of woman. We all suffer thus every day. I have had to do a hundred times what Richardson did but once. Lovelace has a thousand forms, for social corruption takes the hues of the medium in which it lives. Clarissa, on the contrary, the lovely image of impassioned virtue, is drawn in lines of distracting purity. To create a variety of Virgins it needs a Raphael. In this respect, perhaps literature must yield to painting.

Still, I may be allowed to point out how many irreproachable figures—as regards their virtue—are to be found in the portions of this work already published: Pierrette Lorrain, Ursule Mirouët, Constance Birotteau, La Fosseuse, Eugénie Grandet, Marguerite Claës, Pauline de Villenoix, Madame Jules, Madame de la Chanterie, Eve Chardon, Mademoiselle d'Esgrignon, Madame Firmiani, Agathe Rouget, Renée de Maucombe; besides several figures in the middle-distance, who, though less

conspicuous than these, nevertheless, offer the reader an example of domestic virtue; Joseph Lebas, Genestas, Benassis, Bonnet the curé, Minoret the doctor, Pillerault, David Séchard, the two Birotteaus, Chaperon the priest, Judge Popinot, Bourgeat, the Sauviats, the Taschérons, and many more. Do not all these solve the difficult literary problem which consists in making a virtuous person interesting?

It was no small task to depict the two or three thousand conspicuous types of a period; for this is, in fact, the number presented to us by each generation, and which the Human Comedy will require. This crowd of actors, of characters, this multitude of lives, needed a setting—if I may be pardoned the expression, a gallery. Hence the very natural division, as already known, into Scenes of Private Life, of Provincial Life, of Parisian, Political, Military, and Country Life. Under these six heads are classified all the studies of manners which form the history of society at large, of all its *faits et gestes*, as our ancestors would have said. These six classes correspond, indeed, to familiar conceptions. Each has its own sense and meaning, and answers to an epoch in the life of man. I may repeat here, but very briefly, what was written by Felix Davin—a young genius snatched from literature by an early death. After being informed of my plan, he said that the Scenes of Private Life represented childhood and youth and their errors, as the Scenes of Provincial Life represented the age of passion, scheming, self-interest, and ambition. Then the Scenes of Parisian Life give a picture of the tastes and vice and unbridled powers which conduce to the habits peculiar to great cities, where the extremes of good and evil meet. Each of these divisions has its local colour—Paris and the Provinces—a great social antithesis which held for me immense resources.

And not man alone, but the principal events of life, fall into classes by types. There are situations which

occur in every life, typical phases, and this is one of the details I most sought after. I have tried to give an idea of the different districts of our fine country. My work has its geography, as it has its genealogy and its families, its places and things, its persons and their deeds; as it has its heraldry, its nobles and commonalty, its artisans and peasants, its politicians and dandies, its army—in short, a whole world of its own.

After describing social life in these three portions, I had to delineate certain exceptional lives, which comprehend the interests of many people, or of everybody, and are in a degree outside the general law. Hence we have Scenes of Political Life. This vast picture of society being finished and complete, was it not needful to display it in its most violent phase, beside itself, as it were, either in self-defence or for the sake of conquest? Hence the Scenes of Military Life, as yet the most incomplete portion of my work, but for which room will be allowed in this edition, that it may form part of it when done. Finally, the Scenes of Country Life are, in a way, the evening of this long day, if I may so call the social drama. In that part are to be found the purest natures, and the application of the great principles of order, politics, and morality.

Such is the foundation, full of actors, full of comedies and tragedies, on which are raised the Philosophical Studies—the second part of my work, in which the social instrument of all these effects is displayed, and the ravages of the mind are painted, feeling after feeling; the first of this series, *Wild Ass's Skin*, to some extent forms a link between the Philosophical Studies and Studies of Manners, by a work of almost Oriental fancy, in which life itself is shown in a mortal struggle with the very element of all passion.

Besides these, there will be a series of Analytical Studies, of which I will say nothing, for one only is published as yet—The Physiology of Marriage.

In the course of time I propose writing two more

works of this class. First, the Pathology of Social Life, *then an Anatomy of Educational Bodies, and a Monograph on Virtue.*

In looking forward to what remains to be done, my readers will perhaps echo what my publishers say, 'Please God to spare you!' I only ask to be less tormented by men and things than I have hitherto been since I began this terrific labour. I have had this in my favour, and I thank God for it, that the talents of the time, the finest characters and the truest friends, as noble in their private lives as the former are in public life, have wrung my hand and said, Courage!

And why should I not confess that this friendship, and the testimony here and there of persons unknown to me, have upheld me in my career, both against myself and against unjust attacks; against the calumny which has often persecuted me, against discouragement, and against the too eager hopefulness whose utterances are misinterpreted as those of overweening conceit? I had resolved to display stolid stoicism in the face of abuse and insults; but on two occasions base slanders have necessitated a reply. Though the advocates of forgiveness of injuries may regret that I should have displayed my skill in literary fence, there are many Christians who are of opinion that we live in times when it is as well to show sometimes that silence springs from generosity.

The vastness of a plan which includes both a history and a criticism of society, an analysis of its evils, and a discussion of its principles, authorises me, I think, in giving to my work the title under which it now appears —'THE HUMAN COMEDY.' Is this too ambitious? Is it not exact? That, when it is complete, the public must pronounce.

PARIS, *July* 1842.

AT THE SIGN OF THE CAT AND RACKET

Dedicated to Mademoiselle Marie de Montheau

HALF-WAY down the Rue Saint-Denis, almost at the corner of the Rue du Petit-Lion, there stood formerly one of those delightful houses which enable historians to reconstruct old Paris by analogy. The threatening walls of this tumbledown abode seemed to have been decorated with hieroglyphics. For what other name could the passer-by give to the Xs and Vs which the horizontal or diagonal timbers traced on the front, outlined by little parallel cracks in the plaster? It was evident that every beam quivered in its mortices at the passing of the lightest vehicle. This venerable structure was crowned by a triangular roof of which no example will, ere long, be seen in Paris. This covering, warped by the extremes of the Paris climate, projected three feet over the roadway, as much to protect the threshold from the rainfall as to shelter the wall of a loft and its sill-less dormer window. This upper story was built of planks, overlapping each other like slates, in order, no doubt, not to overweight the frail house.

One rainy morning in the month of March, a young man, carefully wrapped in his cloak, stood under the awning of a shop opposite this old house, which he was studying with the enthusiasm of an antiquary. In point of fact, this relic of the civic life of the sixteenth century

offered more than one problem to the consideration of an observer. Each story presented some singularity; on the first floor four tall, narrow windows, close together, were filled as to the lower panes with boards, so as to produce the doubtful light by which a clever salesman can ascribe to his goods the colour his customers inquire for. The young man seemed very scornful of this essential part of the house; his eyes had not yet rested on it. The windows of the second floor, where the Venetian blinds were drawn up, revealing little dingy muslin curtains behind the large Bohemian glass panes, did not interest him either. His attention was attracted to the third floor, to the modest sash-frames of wood, so clumsily wrought that they might have found a place in the Museum of Arts and Crafts to illustrate the early efforts of French carpentry. These windows were glazed with small squares of glass so green that, but for his good eyes, the young man could not have seen the blue-checked cotton curtains which screened the mysteries of the room from profane eyes. Now and then the watcher, weary of his fruitless contemplation, or of the silence in which the house was buried, like the whole neighbourhood, dropped his eyes towards the lower regions. An involuntary smile parted his lips each time he looked at the shop, where, in fact, there were some laughable details.

A formidable wooden beam, resting on four pillars, which appeared to have bent under the weight of the decrepit house, had been encrusted with as many coats of different paint as there are of rouge on an old duchess's cheek. In the middle of this broad and fantastically carved joist there was an old painting representing a cat playing rackets. This picture was what moved the young man to mirth. But it must be said that the wittiest of modern painters could not invent so comical a caricature. The animal held in one of its fore-paws a racket as big as itself, and stood on its hind legs to aim at hitting an enormous ball, returned by

a man in a fine embroidered coat. Drawing, colour, and accessories, all were treated in such a way as to suggest that the artist had meant to make game of the shop-owner and of the passing observer. Time, while impairing this artless painting, had made it yet more grotesque by introducing some uncertain features which must have puzzled the conscientious idler. For instance, the cat's tail had been eaten into in such a way that it might now have been taken for the figure of a spectator—so long, and thick, and furry were the tails of our forefathers' cats. To the right of the picture, on an azure field which ill disguised the decay of the wood, might be read the name 'Guillaume,' and to the left, 'Successor to Master Chevrel.' Sun and rain had worn away most of the gilding parsimoniously applied to the letters of this superscription, in which the Us and Vs had changed places in obedience to the laws of old-world orthography.

To quench the pride of those who believe that the world is growing cleverer day by day, and that modern humbug surpasses everything, it may be observed that these signs, of which the origin seems so whimsical to many Paris merchants, are the dead pictures of once living pictures by which our roguish ancestors contrived to tempt customers into their houses. Thus the Spinning Sow, the Green Monkey, and others, were animals in cages whose skill astonished the passer-by, and whose accomplishments prove the patience of the fifteenth-century artisan. Such curiosities did more to enrich their fortunate owners than the signs of 'Providence,' 'Good-faith,' 'Grace of God,' and 'Decapitation of John the Baptist,' which may still be seen in the Rue Saint-Denis.

However, our stranger was certainly not standing there to admire the cat, which a minute's attention sufficed to stamp on his memory. The young man himself had his peculiarities. His cloak, folded after the manner of an

antique drapery, showed a smart pair of shoes, all the more remarkable in the midst of the Paris mud, because he wore white silk stockings, on which the splashes betrayed his impatience. He had just come, no doubt, from a wedding or a ball; for at this early hour he had in his hand a pair of white gloves, and his black hair, now out of curl, and flowing over his shoulders, showed that it had been dressed *à la Caracalla*, a fashion introduced as much by David's school of painting as by the mania for Greek and Roman styles which characterised the early years of this century.

In spite of the noise made by a few market gardeners, who, being late, rattled past towards the great market-place at a gallop, the busy street lay in a stillness of which the magic charm is known only to those who have wandered through deserted Paris at the hours when its roar, hushed for a moment, rises and spreads in the distance like the great voice of the sea. This strange young man must have seemed as curious to the shopkeeping folk of the 'Cat and Racket' as the 'Cat and Racket' was to him. A dazzlingly white cravat made his anxious face look even paler than it really was. The fire that flashed in his black eyes, gloomy and sparkling by turns, was in harmony with the singular outline of his features, with his wide, flexible mouth, hardened into a smile. His forehead, knit with violent annoyance, had a stamp of doom. Is not the forehead the most prophetic feature of a man? When the stranger's brow expressed passion the furrows formed in it were terrible in their strength and energy; but when he recovered his calmness, so easily upset, it beamed with a luminous grace which gave great attractiveness to a countenance in which joy, grief, love, anger, or scorn blazed out so contagiously that the coldest man could not fail to be impressed.

He was so thoroughly vexed by the time when the dormer window of the loft was suddenly flung open, that he did not observe the apparition of three laughing faces,

pink and white and chubby, but as vulgar as the face of Commerce as it is seen in sculpture on certain monuments. These three faces, framed by the window, recalled the puffy cherubs floating among the clouds that surround God the Father. The apprentices snuffed up the exhalations of the street with an eagerness that showed how hot and poisonous the atmosphere of their garret must be. After pointing to the singular sentinel, the most jovial, as he seemed, of the apprentices retired and came back holding an instrument whose hard metal pipe is now superseded by a leather tube; and they all grinned with mischief as they looked down on the loiterer, and sprinkled him with a fine white shower of which the scent proved that three chins had just been shaved. Standing on tiptoe, in the farthest corner of their loft, to enjoy their victim's rage, the lads ceased laughing on seeing the haughty indifference with which the young man shook his cloak, and the intense contempt expressed by his face as he glanced up at the empty window frame.

At this moment a slender white hand threw up the lower half of one of the clumsy windows on the third floor by the aid of the sash runners, of which the pulley so often suddenly gives way and releases the heavy panes it ought to hold up. The watcher was then rewarded for his long waiting. The face of a young girl appeared, as fresh as one of the white cups that bloom on the bosom of the waters, crowned by a frill of tumbled muslin, which gave her head a look of exquisite innocence. Though wrapped in brown stuff, her neck and shoulders gleamed here and there through little openings left by her movements in sleep. No expression of embarrassment detracted from the candour of her face, or the calm look of eyes immortalised long since in the sublime works of Raphael; here were the same grace, the same repose as in these Virgins, and now proverbial. There was a delightful contrast between the cheeks of that face on

which sleep had, as it were, given high relief to a superabundance of life, and the antiquity of the heavy window with its clumsy shape and black sill. Like those day-blowing flowers, which in the early morning have not yet unfurled their cups, twisted by the chills of night, the girl, as yet hardly awake, let her blue eyes wander beyond the neighbouring roofs to look at the sky; then, from habit, she cast them down on the gloomy depths of the street, where they immediately met those of her adorer. Vanity, no doubt, distressed her at being seen in undress; she started back, the worn pulley gave way, and the sash fell with the rapid run, which in our day has earned for this artless invention of our forefathers an odious name.* The vision had disappeared. To the young man the most radiant star of morning seemed to be hidden by a cloud.

During these little incidents the heavy inside shutters that protected the slight windows of the shop of the 'Cat and Racket' had been removed as if by magic. The old door with its knocker was opened back against the wall of the entry by a man-servant, apparently coeval with the sign, who, with a shaking hand, hung upon it a square of cloth, on which were embroidered in yellow silk the words: 'Guillaume, successor to Chevrel.' Many a passer-by would have found it difficult to guess the class of trade carried on by Monsieur Guillaume. Between the strong iron bars which protected his shop windows on the outside, certain packages, wrapped in brown linen, were hardly visible, though as numerous as herrings swimming in a shoal. Notwithstanding the primitive aspect of the Gothic front, Monsieur Guillaume, of all the merchant clothiers in Paris, was the one whose stores were always the best provided, whose connections were the most extensive, and whose commercial honesty never lay under the slightest suspicion. If some of his brethren in business made a contract with the Government, and had

* Fenêtre à la Guillotine.

not the required quantity of cloth, he was always ready to deliver it, however large the number of pieces tendered for. The wily dealer knew a thousand ways of extracting the largest profits without being obliged, like them, to court patrons, cringing to them, or making them costly presents. When his fellow-tradesmen could only pay in good bills of long date, he would mention his notary as an accommodating man, and managed to get a second profit out of the bargain, thanks to this arrangement, which had made it a proverb among the traders of the Rue Saint-Denis: 'Heaven preserve you from Monsieur Guillaume's notary!' to signify a heavy discount.

The old merchant was to be seen standing on the threshold of his shop, as if by a miracle, the instant the servant withrew. Monsieur Guillaume looked at the Rue Saint-Denis, at the neighbouring shops, and at the weather, like a man disembarking at Havre, and seeing France once more after a long voyage. Having convinced himself that nothing had changed while he was asleep, he presently perceived the stranger on guard, and he, on his part, gazed at the patriarchal draper as Humboldt may have scrutinised the first electric eel he saw in America. Monsieur Guillaume wore loose black velvet breeches, pepper-and-salt stockings, and square-toed shoes with silver buckles. His coat, with square-cut fronts, square-cut tails, and square-cut collar, clothed his slightly bent figure in greenish cloth, finished with white metal buttons, tawny from wear. His grey hair was so accurately combed and flattened over his yellow pate that it made it look like a furrowed field. His little green eyes, that might have been pierced with a gimlet, flashed beneath arches faintly tinged with red in the place of eyebrows. Anxieties had wrinkled his forehead with as many horizontal lines as there were creases in his coat. This colourless face expressed patience, commercial shrewdness, and the sort of wily cupidity which is needful in business. At that time these old

families were less rare than they are now, in which the characteristic habits and costume of their calling, surviving in the midst of more recent civilisation, were preserved as cherished traditions, like the antediluvian remains found by Cuvier in the quarries.

The head of the Guillaume family was a notable upholder of ancient practices; he might be heard to regret the Provost of Merchants, and never did he mention a decision of the Tribunal of Commerce without calling it the *Sentence of the Consuls*. Up and dressed the first of the household, in obedience, no doubt, to these old customs, he stood sternly awaiting the appearance of his three assistants, ready to scold them in case they were late. These young disciples of Mercury knew nothing more terrible than the wordless assiduity with which the master scrutinised their faces and their movements on Monday in search of evidence or traces of their pranks. But at this moment the old clothier paid no heed to his apprentices; he was absorbed in trying to divine the motive of the anxious looks which the young man in silk stockings and a cloak cast alternately at his signboard and into the depths of his shop. The daylight was now brighter, and enabled the stranger to discern the cashier's corner enclosed by a railing and screened by old green silk curtains, where were kept the immense ledgers, the silent oracles of the house. The too inquisitive gazer seemed to covet this little nook, and to be taking the plan of a dining-room at one side, lighted by a skylight, whence the family at meals could easily see the smallest incident that might occur at the shop-door. So much affection for his dwelling seemed suspicious to a trader who had lived long enough to remember the law of maximum prices; Monsieur Guillaume naturally thought that this sinister personage had an eye to the till of the Cat and Racket. After quietly observing the mute duel which was going on between his master and the stranger, the eldest of the

apprentices, having seen that the young man was stealthily watching the windows of the third floor, ventured to place himself on the stone flag where Monsieur Guillaume was standing. He took two steps out into the street, raised his head, and fancied that he caught sight of Mademoiselle Augustine Guillaume in hasty retreat. The draper, annoyed by his assistant's perspicacity, shot a side glance at him; but the draper and his amorous apprentice were suddenly relieved from the fears which the young man's presence had excited in their minds. He hailed a hackney cab on its way to a neighbouring stand, and jumped into it with an air of affected indifference. This departure was a balm to the hearts of the other two lads, who had been somewhat uneasy as to meeting the victim of their practical joke.

'Well, gentlemen, what ails you that you are standing there with your arms folded?' said Monsieur Guillaume to his three neophytes. 'In former days, bless you, when I was in Master Chevrel's service, I should have overhauled more than two pieces of cloth by this time.'

'Then it was daylight earlier,' said the second assistant, whose duty this was.

The old shopkeeper could not help smiling. Though two of these young fellows, who were confided to his care by their fathers, rich manufacturers at Louviers and at Sedan, had only to ask and to have a hundred thousand francs the day when they were old enough to settle in life, Guillaume regarded it as his duty to keep them under the rod of an old-world despotism, unknown nowadays in the showy modern shops, where the apprentices expect to be rich men at thirty. He made them work like negroes. These three assistants were equal to a business which would harry ten such clerks as those whose sybaritical tastes now swell the columns of the budget. Not a sound disturbed the peace of this solemn house, where the hinges were always oiled, and where the meanest article of furniture showed the respectable

cleanliness which reveals strict order and economy. The most waggish of the three youths often amused himself by writing the date of its first appearance on the Gruyère cheese which was left to their tender mercies at breakfast, and which it was their pleasure to leave untouched. This bit of mischief, and few others of the same stamp, would sometimes bring a smile on the face of the younger of Guillaume's two daughters, the pretty maiden who has just now appeared to the bewitched man in the street.

Though each of the apprentices, even the eldest, paid a round sum for his board, not one of them would have been bold enough to remain at the master's table when dessert was served. When Madame Guillaume talked of dressing the salad, the hapless youths trembled as they thought of the thrift with which her prudent hand dispensed the oil. They could never think of spending a night away from the house without having given, long before, a plausible reason for such an irregularity. Every Sunday, each in his turn, two of them accompanied the Guillaume family to mass at Saint-Leu, and to vespers. Mesdemoiselles Virginie and Augustine, simply attired in cotton print, each took the arm of an apprentice and walked in front, under the piercing eye of their mother, who closed the little family procession with her husband, accustomed by her to carry two large prayer-books, bound in black morocco. The second apprentice received no salary. As for the eldest, whose twelve years of perseverance and discretion had initiated him into the secrets of the house, he was paid eight hundred francs a year as the reward of his labours. On certain family festivals he received as a gratuity some little gift, to which Madame Guillaume's dry and wrinkled hand alone gave value—netted purses, which she took care to stuff with cotton wool, to show off the fancy stitches, braces of the strongest make, or heavy silk stockings. Sometimes, but rarely, this prime minister was admitted to share the pleasures of the family when they went into

the country, or when, after waiting for months, they made up their mind to exert the right acquired by taking a box at the theatre to command a piece which Paris had already forgotten.

As to the other assistants, the barrier of respect which formerly divided a master draper from his apprentices was so firmly established between them and the old shopkeeper, that they would have been more likely to steal a piece of cloth than to infringe this time-honoured etiquette Such reserve may now appear ridiculous; but these old houses were a school of honesty and sound morals. The masters adopted their apprentices. The young man's linen was cared for, mended, and often replaced by the mistress of the house. If an apprentice fell ill, he was the object of truly maternal attention. In a case of danger the master lavished his money in calling in the most celebrated physicians, for he was not answerable to their parents merely for the good conduct and training of the lads. If one of them, whose character was unimpeachable, suffered misfortune, these old tradesmen knew how to value the intelligence he had displayed, and they did not hesitate to entrust the happiness of their daughters to men whom they had long trusted with their fortunes. Guillaume was one of these men of the old school, and if he had their ridiculous side, he had all their good qualities; and Joseph Lebas, the chief assistant, an orphan without any fortune, was in his mind destined to be the husband of Virginie, his elder daughter. But Joseph did not share the symmetrical ideas of his master, who would not for an empire have given his second daughter in marriage before the elder. The unhappy assistant felt that his heart was wholly given to Mademoiselle Augustine, the younger. In order to justify this passion, which had grown up in secret, it is necessary to inquire a little further into the springs of the absolute government which ruled the old cloth-merchant's household.

Guillaume had two daughters. The elder, Mademoiselle Virginie, was the very image of her mother. Madame Guillaume, daughter of the Sieur Chevrel, sat so upright in the stool behind her desk, that more than once she had heard some wag bet that she was a stuffed figure. Her long, thin face betrayed exaggerated piety. Devoid of attractions or of amiable manners, Madame Guillaume commonly decorated her head—that of a woman near on sixty—with a cap of a particular and unvarying shape, with long lappets, like that of a widow. In all the neighbourhood she was known as the 'portress nun.' Her speech was curt, and her movements had the stiff precision of a semaphore. Her eye, with a gleam in it like a cat's, seemed to spite the world because she was so ugly. Mademoiselle Virginie, brought up, like her younger sister, under the domestic rule of her mother, had reached the age of eight-and-twenty. Youth mitigated the graceless effect which her likeness to her mother sometimes gave to her features, but maternal austerity had endowed her with two great qualities which made up for everything. She was patient and gentle. Mademoiselle Augustine, who was but just eighteen, was not like either her father or her mother. She was one of those daughters whose total absence of any physical affinity with their parents makes one believe in the adage: God gives children. Augustine was little, or, to describe her more truly, delicately made. Full of gracious candour, a man of the world could have found no fault in the charming girl beyond a certain meanness of gesture or vulgarity of attitude, and sometimes a want of ease. Her silent and placid face was full of the transient melancholy which comes over all young girls who are too weak to dare to resist their mother's will.

The two sisters, always plainly dressed, could not gratify the innate vanity of womanhood but by a luxury of cleanliness which became them wonderfully, and made them harmonise with the polished counters and

the shining shelves, on which the old man-servant never left a speck of dust, and with the old-world simplicity of all they saw about them. As their style of living compelled them to find the elements of happiness in persistent work, Augustine and Virginie had hitherto always satisfied their mother, who secretly prided herself on the perfect characters of her two daughters. It is easy to imagine the results of the training they had received. Brought up to a commercial life, accustomed to hear nothing but dreary arguments and calculations about trade, having studied nothing but grammar, book-keeping, a little Bible-history, and the history of France in Le Ragois, and never reading any book but those their mother would sanction, their ideas had not acquired much scope. They knew perfectly how to keep house; they were familiar with the prices of things; they understood the difficulty of amassing money; they were economical, and had a great respect for the qualities that make a man of business. Although their father was rich, they were as skilled in darning as in embroidery; their mother often talked of having them taught to cook, so that they might know how to order a dinner and scold a cook with due knowledge. They knew nothing of the pleasures of the world; and, seeing how their parents spent their exemplary lives, they very rarely suffered their eyes to wander beyond the walls of their hereditary home, which to their mother was the whole universe. The meetings to which family anniversaries gave rise filled in the future of earthly joy to them.

When the great drawing-room on the second floor was to be prepared to receive company—Madame Roquin, a Demoiselle Chevrel, fifteen months younger than her cousin, and bedecked with diamonds; young Rabourdin, employed in the Finance Office; Monsieur César Birotteau, the rich perfumer, and his wife, known as Madame César; Monsieur Camusot, the richest silk mercer in the Rue des Bourdonnais, with his father-in-law,

Monsieur Cardot, two or three old bankers, and some immaculate ladies—the arrangements, made necessary by the way in which everything was packed away—the plate, the Dresden china, the candlesticks, and the glass—made a variety in the monotonous lives of the three women, who came and went and exerted themselves as nuns would to receive their bishop. Then, in the evening, when all three were tired out with having wiped, rubbed, unpacked, and arranged all the gauds of the festival, as the girls helped their mother to undress, Madame Guillaume would say to them, 'Children, we have done nothing to-day.'

When, on very great occasions, 'the portress nun' allowed dancing, restricting the games of Boston, whist, and backgammon within the limits of her bedroom, such a concession was accounted as the most unhoped felicity, and made them happier than going to the great balls, to two or three of which Guillaume would take the girls at the time of the Carnival.

And once a year the worthy draper gave an entertainment, when he spared no expense. However rich and fashionable the persons invited might be, they were careful not to be absent; for the most important houses on the exchange had recourse to the immense credit, the fortune, or the time-honoured experience of Monsieur Guillaume. Still, the excellent merchant's two daughters did not benefit as much as might be supposed by the lessons the world has to offer to young spirits. At these parties, which were indeed set down in the ledger to the credit of the house, they wore dresses the shabbiness of which made them blush. Their style of dancing was not in any way remarkable, and their mother's surveillance did not allow of their holding any conversation with their partners beyond Yes and No. Also, the law of the old sign of the Cat and Racket commanded that they should be home by eleven o'clock, the hour when balls and fêtes begin to be lively. Thus their pleasures, which seemed

to conform very fairly to their father's position, were often made insipid by circumstances which were part of the family habits and principles.

As to their usual life, one remark will sufficiently paint it. Madame Guillaume required her daughters to be dressed very early in the morning, to come down every day at the same hour, and she ordered their employments with monastic regularity. Augustine, however, had been gifted by chance with a spirit lofty enough to feel the emptiness of such a life. Her blue eyes would sometimes be raised as if to pierce the depths of that gloomy staircase and those damp store-rooms. After sounding the profound cloistral silence, she seemed to be listening to remote, inarticulate revelations of the life of passion, which accounts feelings as of higher value than things. And at such moments her cheek would flush, her idle hands would lay the muslin sewing on the polished oak counter, and presently her mother would say in a voice, of which even the softest tones were sour, 'Augustine, my treasure, what are you thinking about?' It is possible that two romances discovered by Augustine in the cupboard of a cook Madame Guillaume had lately discharged—*Hippolyte comte de Douglas* and *Le Comte de Comminges*—may have contributed to develop the ideas of the young girl, who had devoured them in secret, during the long nights of the past winter.

And so Augustine's expression of vague longing, her gentle voice, her jasmine skin, and her blue eyes had lighted in poor Lebas' soul a flame as ardent as it was reverent. From an easily understood caprice, Augustine felt no affection for the orphan; perhaps because she did not know that he loved her. On the other hand, the senior apprentice, with his long legs, his chestnut hair, his big hands and powerful frame, had found a secret admirer in Mademoiselle Virginie, who, in spite of her dower of fifty thousand crowns, had as yet no suitor. Nothing could be more natural than these two passions at cross-

purposes, born in the silence of the dingy shop, as violets bloom in the depths of a wood. The mute and constant looks which made the young people's eyes meet by sheer need of change in the midst of persistent work and cloistered peace, was sure, sooner or later, to give rise to feelings of love. The habit of seeing always the same face leads insensibly to our reading there the qualities of the soul, and at last effaces all its defects.

'At the pace at which that man goes, our girls will soon have to go on their knees to a suitor!' said Monsieur Guillaume to himself, as he read the first decree by which Napoleon drew in advance on the conscript classes.

From that day the old merchant, grieved at seeing his eldest daughter fade, remembered how he had married Mademoiselle Chevrel under much the same circumstances as those of Joseph Lebas and Virginie. A good bit of business, to marry off his daughter, and discharge a sacred debt by repaying to an orphan the benefit he had formerly received from his predecessor under similar conditions! Joseph Lebas, who was now three-and-thirty, was aware of the obstacle which a difference of fifteen years placed between Augustine and himself. Being also too clear-sighted not to understand Monsieur Guillaume's purpose, he knew his inexorable principles well enough to feel sure that the second would never marry before the elder. So the hapless assistant, whose heart was as warm as his legs were long and his chest deep, suffered in silence.

This was the state of affairs in the tiny republic which, in the heart of the Rue Saint-Denis, was not unlike a dependency of La Trappe. But to give a full account of events as well as of feelings, it is needful to go back to some months before the scene with which this story opens. At dusk one evening, a young man passing the darkened shop of the Cat and Racket, had paused for a moment to gaze at a picture which might have arrested every painter in the world. The shop was not yet lighted,

and was as a dark cave beyond which the dining-room was visible. A hanging lamp shed the yellow light which lends such charm to pictures of the Dutch school. The white linen, the silver, the cut glass, were brilliant accessories, and made more picturesque by strong contrasts of light and shade. The figures of the head of the family and his wife, the faces of the apprentices, and the pure form of Augustine, near whom a fat chubby-cheeked maid was standing, composed so strange a group; the heads were so singular, and every face had so candid an expression; it was so easy to read the peace, the silence, the modest way of life in this family, that to an artist accustomed to render nature, there was something hopeless in any attempt to depict this scene, come upon by chance. The stranger was a young painter, who, seven years before, had gained the first prize for painting. He had now just come back from Rome. His soul, full-fed with poetry; his eyes, satiated with Raphael and Michael Angelo, thirsted for real nature after long dwelling in the pompous land where art has everywhere left something grandiose. Right or wrong, this was his personal feeling. His heart, which had long been a prey to the fire of Italian passion, craved one of those modest and meditative maidens whom in Rome he had unfortunately seen only in painting. From the enthusiasm produced in his excited fancy by the living picture before him, he naturally passed to a profound admiration for the principal figure; Augustine seemed to be pensive, and did not eat; by the arrangement of the lamp the light fell full on her face, and her bust seemed to move in a circle of fire, which threw up the shape of her head and illuminated it with almost supernatural effect. The artist involuntarily compared her to an exiled angel dreaming of heaven. An almost unknown emotion, a limpid, seething love flooded his heart. After remaining a minute, overwhelmed by the weight of his ideas, he tore himself from his bliss, went home, ate nothing, and could not sleep.

The next day he went to his studio, and did not come out of it till he had placed on canvas the magic of the scene of which the memory had, in a sense, made him a devotee; his happiness was incomplete till he should possess a faithful portrait of his idol. He went many times past the house of the Cat and Racket; he even ventured in once or twice, under a disguise, to get a closer view of the bewitching creature that Madame Guillaume covered with her wing. For eight whole months, devoted to his love and to his brush, he was lost to the sight of his most intimate friends, forgetting the world, the theatre, poetry, music, and all his dearest habits. One morning Girodet broke through all the barriers with which artists are familiar, and which they know how to evade, went into his room, and woke him by asking, 'What are you going to send to the Salon?' The artist grasped his friend's hand, dragged him off to the studio, uncovered a small easel picture and a portrait. After a long and eager study of the two masterpieces, Girodet threw himself on his comrade's neck and hugged him, without speaking a word. His feelings could only be expressed as he felt them—soul to soul.

'You are in love?' said Girodet.

They both knew that the finest portraits by Titian, Raphael, and Leonardo da Vinci, were the outcome of the enthusiastic sentiments by which, indeed, under various conditions, every masterpiece is engendered. The artist only bent his head in reply.

'How happy are you to be able to be in love, here, after coming back from Italy! But I do not advise you to send such works as these to the Salon,' the great painter went on. 'You see, these two works will not be appreciated. Such true colouring, such prodigious work, cannot yet be understood; the public is not accustomed to such depths. The pictures we paint, my dear fellow, are mere screens. We should do better to turn rhymes, and translate the antique poets! There is more

glory to be looked for there than from our luckless canvases!'

Notwithstanding this charitable advice, the two pictures were exhibited. The *Interior* made a revolution in painting. It gave birth to the pictures of genre which pour into all our exhibitions in such prodigious quantity that they might be supposed to be produced by machinery. As to the portrait, few artists have forgotten that lifelike work; and the public, which as a body is sometimes discerning, awarded it the crown which Girodet himself had hung over it. The two pictures were surrounded by a vast throng. They fought for places, as women say. Speculators and moneyed men would have covered the canvas with double Napoleons, but the artist obstinately refused to sell or to make replicas. An enormous sum was offered him for the right of engraving them, and the printsellers were not more favoured than the amateurs.

Though these incidents occupied the world, they were not of a nature to penetrate the recesses of the monastic solitude in the Rue Saint-Denis. However, when paying a visit to Madame Guillaume, the notary's wife spoke of the exhibition before Augustine, of whom she was very fond, and explained its purpose. Madame Roquin's gossip naturally inspired Augustine with a wish to see the pictures, and with courage enough to ask her cousin secretly to take her to the Louvre. Her cousin succeeded in the negotiations she opened with Madame Guillaume for permission to release the young girl for two hours from her dull labours. Augustine was thus able to make her way through the crowd to see the crowned work. A fit of trembling shook her like an aspen leaf as she recognised herself. She was terrified, and looked about her to find Madame Roquin, from whom she had been separated by a tide of people. At that moment her frightened eyes fell on the impassioned face of the young painter. She at once recalled the figure of a loiterer whom, being curious, she had frequently observed, believing him to be a new neighbour.

'You see how love has inspired me,' said the artist in the timid creature's ear, and she stood in dismay at the words.

She found supernatural courage to enable her to push through the crowd and join her cousin, who was still struggling with the mass of people that hindered her from getting to the picture.

'You will be stifled!' cried Augustine. 'Let us go.'

But there are moments, at the Salon, when two women are not always free to direct their steps through the galleries. By the irregular course to which they were compelled by the press, Mademoiselle Guillaume and her cousin were pushed to within a few steps of the second picture. Chance thus brought them, both together, to where they could easily see the canvas made famous by fashion, for once in agreement with talent. Madame Roquin's exclamation of surprise was lost in the hubbub and buzz of the crowd; Augustine involuntarily shed tears at the sight of this wonderful study. Then, by an almost unaccountable impulse, she laid her finger on her lips, as she perceived quite near her the ecstatic face of the young painter. The stranger replied by a nod, and pointed to Madame Roquin, as a spoil-sport, to show Augustine that he had understood. This pantomime struck the young girl like hot coals on her flesh; she felt quite guilty as she perceived that there was a compact between herself and the artist. The suffocating heat, the dazzling sight of beautiful dresses, the bewilderment produced in Augustine's brain by the truth of colouring, the multitude of living or painted figures, the profusion of gilt frames, gave her a sense of intoxication which doubled her alarms. She would perhaps have fainted if an unknown rapture had not surged up in her heart to vivify her whole being, in spite of this chaos of sensations. She nevertheless believed herself to be under the power of the Devil, of whose awful snares she had been warned by the thundering words of preachers. This moment was to her like a moment of madness. She found herself

accompanied to her cousin's carriage by the young man, radiant with joy and love. Augustine, a prey to an agitation new to her experience, an intoxication which seemed to abandon her to nature, listened to the eloquent voice of her heart, and looked again and again at the young painter, betraying the emotion that came over her. Never had the bright rose of her cheeks shown in stronger contrast with the whiteness of her skin. The artist saw her beauty in all its bloom, her maiden modesty in all its glory. She herself felt a sort of rapture mingled with terror at thinking that her presence had brought happiness to him whose name was on every lip, and whose talent lent immortality to transient scenes. She was loved! It was impossible to doubt it. When she no longer saw the artist, these simple words still echoed in her ear, 'You see how love has inspired me!' And the throbs of her heart, as they grew deeper, seemed a pain, her heated blood revealed so many unknown forces in her being. She affected a severe headache to avoid replying to her cousin's questions concerning the pictures; but on their return Madame Roquin could not forbear from speaking to Madame Guillaume of the fame that had fallen on the house of the Cat and Racket, and Augustine quaked in every limb as she heard her mother say that she should go to the Salon to see her house there. The young girl again declared herself suffering, and obtained leave to go to bed.

'That is what comes of sight-seeing,' exclaimed Monsieur Guillaume—'a headache. And is it so very amusing to see in a picture what you can see any day in your own street? Don't talk to me of your artists! Like writers, they are a starveling crew. Why the devil need they choose my house to flout it in their pictures?'

'It may help to sell a few ells more of cloth,' said Joseph Lebas.

This remark did not protect art and thought from being condemned once again before the judgment-seat

of trade. As may be supposed, these speeches did not infuse much hope into Augustine, who, during the night, gave herself up to the first meditations of love. The events of the day were like a dream, which it was joy to recall to her mind. She was initiated into the fears, the hopes, the remorse, all the ebb and flow of feeling which could not fail to toss a heart so simple and so timid as hers. What a void she perceived in this gloomy house! What a treasure she found in her soul! To be the wife of a genius, to share his glory! What ravages must such a vision make in the heart of a girl brought up among such a family! What hopes must it raise in a young creature who, in the midst of sordid elements, had pined for a life of elegance! A sunbeam had fallen into the prison. Augustine was suddenly in love. So many of her feelings were soothed that she succumbed without reflection. At eighteen does not love hold a prism between the world and the eyes of a young girl? She was incapable of suspecting the hard facts which result from the union of a loving woman with a man of imagination, and she believed herself called to make him happy, not seeing any disparity between herself and him. To her the future would be as the present. When, next day, her father and mother returned from the Salon, their dejected faces proclaimed some disappointment. In the first place, the painter had removed the two pictures; and then Madame Guillaume had lost her cashmere shawl. But the news that the pictures had disappeared from the walls since her visit revealed to Augustine a delicacy of sentiment which a woman can always appreciate, even by instinct.

On the morning when, on his way home from a ball, Théodore de Sommervieux—for this was the name which fame had stamped on Augustine's heart—had been squirted on by the apprentices while awaiting the appearance of his artless little friend, who certainly did not know that he was there, the lovers had seen each other

for the fourth time only since their meeting at the Salon. The difficulties which the rule of the house placed in the way of the painter's ardent nature gave added violence to his passion for Augustine.

How could he get near to a young girl seated in a counting-house between two such women as Mademoiselle Virginie and Madame Guillaume? How could he correspond with her when her mother never left her side? Ingenious, as lovers are, to imagine woes, Théodore saw a rival in one of the assistants, to whose interests he supposed the others to be devoted. If he should evade these sons of Argus, he would yet be wrecked under the stern eyes of the old draper or of Madame Guillaume. The very vehemence of his passion hindered the young painter from hitting on the ingenious expedients which, in prisoners and in lovers, seem to be the last effort of intelligence spurred by a wild craving for liberty, or by the fire of love. Théodore wandered about the neighbourhood with the restlessness of a madman, as though movement might inspire him with some device. After racking his imagination, it occurred to him to bribe the blowsy waiting-maid with gold. Thus a few notes were exchanged at long intervals during the fortnight following the ill-starred morning when Monsieur Guillaume and Théodore had so scrutinised one another. At the present moment the young couple had agreed to see each other at a certain hour of the day, and on Sunday, at Saint-Leu, during mass and vespers. Augustine had sent her dear Théodore a list of the relations and friends of the family, to whom the young painter tried to get access, in the hope of interesting, if it were possible, in his love affairs, one of these souls absorbed in money and trade, to whom a genuine passion must appear a quite monstrous speculation, a thing unheard-of. Nothing, meanwhile, was altered at the sign of the Cat and Racket. If Augustine was absent-minded, if, against all obedience to the domestic code, she stole up to her room to make

signals by means of a jar of flowers, if she sighed, if she were lost in thought, no one observed it, not even her mother. This will cause some surprise to those who have entered into the spirit of the household, where an idea tainted with poetry would be in startling contrast to persons and things, where no one could venture on a gesture or a look which would not be seen and analysed. Nothing, however, could be more natural: the quiet barque that navigated the stormy waters of the Paris Exchange, under the flag of the Cat and Racket, was just now in the toils of one of these tempests which, returning periodically, might be termed equinoctial. For the last fortnight the five men forming the crew, with Madame Guillaume and Mademoiselle Virginie, had been devoting themselves to the hard labour, known as stock-taking.

Every bale was turned over, and the length verified to ascertain the exact value of the remnant. The ticket attached to each parcel was carefully examined to see at what time the piece had been bought. The retail price was fixed. Monsieur Guillaume, always on his feet, his pen behind his ear, was like a captain commanding the working of the ship. His sharp tones, spoken through a trap-door, to inquire into the depths of the hold in the cellar-store, gave utterance to the barbarous formulas of trade-jargon, which find expression only in cypher. 'How much H.N.Z.?'—'All sold.'—'What is left of Q.X.?'—'Two ells.'—'At what price?'—'Fifty-five three.'—'Set down A. at three, with all of J.J., all of M.P., and what is left of V.D.O.'—A hundred other injunctions equally intelligible were spouted over the counters like verses of modern poetry, quoted by romantic spirits, to excite each other's enthusiasm for one of their poets. In the evening Guillaume, shut up with his assistant and his wife, balanced his accounts, carried on the balance, wrote to debtors in arrears, and made out bills. All three were busy over this enormous labour, of

which the result could be stated on a sheet of foolscap, proving to the head of the house that there was so much to the good in hard cash, so much in goods, so much in bills and notes; that he did not owe a sou; that a hundred or two hundred thousand francs were owing to him; that the capital had been increased; that the farm-lands, the houses, or the investments were extended, or repaired, or doubled. Whence it became necessary to begin again with increased ardour, to accumulate more crown-pieces, without its ever entering the brain of these laborious ants to ask—'To what end?'

Favoured by this annual turmoil, the happy Augustine escaped the investigations of her Argus-eyed relations. At last, one Saturday evening, the stock-taking was finished. The figures of the sum-total showed a row of 0s long enough to allow Guillaume for once to relax the stern rule as to dessert which reigned throughout the year. The shrewd old draper rubbed his hands, and allowed his assistants to remain at table. The members of the crew had hardly swallowed their thimbleful of some home-made liqueur, when the rumble of a carriage was heard. The family party were going to see *Cendrillon* at the Variétés, while the two younger apprentices each received a crown of six francs, with permission to go wherever they chose, provided they were in by midnight.

Notwithstanding this debauch, the old cloth-merchant was shaving himself at six next morning, put on his maroon-coloured coat, of which the glowing lights afforded him perennial enjoyment, fastened a pair of gold buckles on the knee-straps of his ample satin breeches; and then, at about seven o'clock, while all were still sleeping in the house, he made his way to the little office adjoining the shop on the first floor. Daylight came in through a window, fortified by iron bars, and looking out on a small yard surrounded by such black walls that it was very like a well. The old merchant opened the

iron-lined shutters, which were so familiar to him, and threw up the lower half of the sash window. The icy air of the courtyard came in to cool the hot atmosphere of the little room, full of the odour peculiar to offices.

The merchant remained standing, his hand resting on the greasy arm of a large cane chair lined with morocco, of which the original hue had disappeared; he seemed to hesitate as to seating himself. He looked with affection at the double desk, where his wife's seat, opposite his own, was fitted into a little niche in the wall. He contemplated the numbered boxes, the files, the implements, the cash box—objects all of immemorial origin, and fancied himself in the room with the shade of Master Chevrel. He even pulled out the high stool on which he had once sat in the presence of his departed master. This stool, covered with black leather, the horse-hair showing at every corner—as it had long done, without, however, coming out—he placed with a shaking hand on the very spot where his predecessor had put it, and then, with an emotion difficult to describe, he pulled a bell, which rang at the head of Joseph Lebas' bed. When this decisive blow had been struck, the old man, for whom, no doubt, these reminiscences were too much, took up three or four bills of exchange, and looked at them without seeing them.

Suddenly Joseph Lebas stood before him.

'Sit down there,' said Guillaume, pointing to the stool.

As the old master draper had never yet bid his assistant be seated in his presence, Joseph Lebas was startled.

'What do you think of these notes?' asked Guillaume.

'They will never be paid.'

'Why?'

'Well, I heard that the day before yesterday Etienne and Co. had made their payments in gold.'

'Oh, oh!' said the draper. 'Well, one must be very ill to show one's bile. Let us speak of something else,—Joseph, the stock-taking is done.'

'Yes, Monsieur, and the dividend is one of the best you have ever made.'

'Do not use new-fangled words. Say the profits, Joseph. Do you know, my boy, that this result is partly owing to you? And I do not intend to pay you a salary any longer. Madame Guillaume has suggested to me to take you into partnership.—"Guillaume and Lebas"; will not that make a good business name? We might add, "and Co." to round off the firm's signature.'

Tears rose to the eyes of Joseph Lebas, who tried to hide them.

'Oh, Monsieur Guillaume, how have I deserved such kindness? I only do my duty. It was so much already that you should take an interest in a poor orph——'

He was brushing the cuff of his left sleeve with his right hand, and dared not look at the old man, who smiled as he thought that this modest young fellow no doubt needed, as he had needed once on a time, some encouragement to complete his explanation.

'To be sure,' said Virginie's father, 'you do not altogether deserve this favour, Joseph. You have not so much confidence in me as I have in you. (The young man looked up quickly.) You know all the secrets of the cash-box. For the last two years I have told you of almost all my concerns. I have sent you to travel in our goods. In short, I have nothing on my conscience as regards you. But you—you have a soft place, and you have never breathed a word of it.' Joseph Lebas blushed. 'Ah, ha!' cried Guillaume, 'so you thought you could deceive an old fox like me? When you knew that I had scented the Lecocq bankruptcy?'

'What, Monsieur?' replied Joseph Lebas, looking at his master as keenly as his master looked at him, 'you knew that I was in love?'

'I know everything, you rascal,' said the worthy and cunning old merchant, pulling the assistant's ear. 'And I forgive you—I did the same myself.'

'And you will give her to me?'

'Yes—with fifty thousand crowns; and I will leave you as much by will, and we will start on our new career under the name of a new firm. We will do good business yet, my boy!' added the old man, getting up and flourishing his arms. 'I tell you, son-in-law, there is nothing like trade. Those who ask what pleasure is to be found in it are simpletons. To be on the scent of a good bargain, to hold your own on 'Change, to watch as anxiously as at the gaming table whether Étienne and Co. will fail or no, to see a regiment of Guards march past all dressed in your cloth, to trip your neighbour up—honestly of course!—to make the goods cheaper than others can; then to carry out an undertaking which you have planned, which begins, grows, totters, and succeeds! to know the workings of every house of business as well as a minister of police, so as never to make a mistake; to hold up your head in the midst of wrecks, to have friends by correspondence in every manufacturing town; is not that a perpetual game, Joseph? That is life, that is! I shall die in that harness, like old Chevrel, but taking it easy now, all the same.'

In the heat of his eager rhetoric, old Guillaume had scarcely looked at his assistant, who was weeping copiously. 'Why, Joseph, my poor boy, what is the matter?'

'Oh, I love her so! Monsieur Guillaume, that my heart fails me; I believe——'

'Well, well, boy,' said the old man, touched, 'you are happier than you know, by Gad! For she loves you. I know it.'

And he blinked his little green eyes as he looked at the young man.

'Mademoiselle Augustine! Mademoiselle Augustine!' exclaimed Joseph Lebas in his rapture.

He was about to rush out of the room when he felt himself clutched by a hand of iron, and his astonished master spun him round in front of him once more.

'What has Augustine to do with this matter?' he asked, in a voice which instantly froze the luckless Joseph.

'Is it not she that—that—I love?' stammered the assistant.

Much put out by his own want of perspicacity, Guillaume sat down again, and rested his long head in his hands to consider the perplexing situation in which he found himself. Joseph Lebas, shamefaced and in despair, remained standing.

'Joseph,' the draper said with frigid dignity, 'I was speaking of Virginie. Love cannot be made to order, I know. I know, too, that you can be trusted. We will forget all this. I will not let Augustine marry before Virginie.—Your interest will be ten per cent.'

The young man, to whom love gave I know not what power of courage and eloquence, clasped his hand, and spoke in his turn—spoke for a quarter of an hour, with so much warmth and feeling, that he altered the situation. If the question had been a matter of business, the old tradesman would have had fixed principles to guide his decision; but, tossed a thousand miles from commerce, on the ocean of sentiment, without a compass, he floated, as he told himself, undecided in the face of such an unexpected event. Carried away by his fatherly kindness, he began to beat about the bush.

'Deuce take it, Joseph, you must know that there are ten years between my two children. Mademoiselle Chevrel was no beauty, still she has had nothing to complain of in me. Do as I did. Come, come, don't cry. Can you be so silly? What is to be done? It can be managed perhaps. There is always some way out of a scrape. And we men are not always devoted Celadons to our wives—you understand? Madame Guillaume is very pious. . . . Come. By Gad, boy, give your arm to Augustine this morning as we go to mass.'

These were the phrases spoken at random by the old draper, and their conclusion made the lover happy. He

was already thinking of a friend of his as a match for Mademoiselle Virginie, as he went out of the smoky office, pressing his future father-in-law's hand, after saying with a knowing look that all would turn out for the best.

'What will Madame Guillaume say to it?' was the idea that greatly troubled the worthy merchant when he found himself alone.

At breakfast Madame Guillaume and Virginie, to whom the draper had not as yet confided his disappointment, cast meaning glances at Joseph Lebas, who was extremely embarrassed. The young assistant's bashfulness commended him to his mother-in-law's good graces. The matron became so cheerful that she smiled as she looked at her husband, and allowed herself some little pleasantries of time-honoured acceptance in such simple families. She wondered whether Joseph or Virginie were the taller, to ask them to compare their height. This preliminary fooling brought a cloud to the master's brow, and he even made such a point of decorum that he desired Augustine to take the assistant's arm on their way to Saint-Leu. Madame Guillaume, surprised at this manly delicacy, honoured her husband with a nod of approval. So the procession left the house in such order as to suggest no suspicious meaning to the neighbours.

'Does it not seem to you, Mademoiselle Augustine,' said the assistant, and he trembled, 'that the wife of a merchant whose credit is as good as Monsieur Guillaume's, for instance, might enjoy herself a little more than Madame your mother does? Might wear diamonds—or keep a carriage? For my part, if I were to marry, I should be glad to take all the work, and see my wife happy. I would not put her into the counting-house. In the drapery business, you see, a woman is not so necessary now as formerly. Monsieur Guillaume was quite right to act as he did—and besides, his wife liked it. But so long as a woman knows how to turn her hand to the book-keeping, the correspondence, the retail business,

the orders, and her housekeeping, so as not to sit idle, that is enough. At seven o'clock, when the shop is shut, I shall take my pleasures, go to the play, and into company. —But you are not listening to me.'

'Yes, indeed, Monsieur Joseph. What do you think of painting? That is a fine calling.'

'Yes. I know a master house-painter, Monsieur Lourdois. He is well-to-do.'

Thus conversing, the family reached the Church of Saint-Leu. There Madame Guillaume reasserted her rights, and, for the first time, placed Augustine next to herself, Virginie taking her place on the fourth chair, next to Lebas. During the sermon all went well between Augustine and Théodore, who, standing behind a pillar, worshipped his Madonna with fervent devotion; but at the elevation of the Host, Madame Guillaume discovered, rather late, that her daughter Augustine was holding her prayer-book upside down. She was about to speak to her strongly, when, lowering her veil, she interrupted her own devotions to look in the direction where her daughter's eyes found attraction. By the help of her spectacles she saw the young artist, whose fashionable elegance seemed to proclaim him a cavalry officer on leave rather than a tradesman of the neighbourhood. It is difficult to conceive of the state of violent agitation in which Madame Guillaume found herself—she, who flattered herself on having brought up her daughters to perfection—on discovering in Augustine a clandestine passion of which her prudery and ignorance exaggerated the perils. She believed her daughter to be cankered to the core.

'Hold your book right way up, Miss,' she muttered in a low voice, tremulous with wrath. She snatched away the tell-tale prayer-book and returned it with the letter-press right way up. 'Do not allow your eyes to look anywhere but at your prayers,' she added, 'or I shall have something to say to you. Your father and I will talk to you after church.'

These words came like a thunderbolt on poor Augustine. She felt faint; but, torn between the distress she felt and the dread of causing a commotion in church, she bravely concealed her anguish. It was, however, easy to discern the stormy state of her soul from the trembling of her prayer-book, and the tears which dropped on every page she turned. From the furious glare shot at him by Madame Guillaume the artist saw the peril into which his love affair had fallen; he went out, with a raging soul, determined to venture all.

'Go to your room, Miss!' said Madame Guillaume, on their return home; 'we will send for you, but take care not to quit it.'

The conference between the husband and wife was conducted so secretly that at first nothing was heard of it. Virginie, however, who had tried to give her sister courage by a variety of gentle remonstrances, carried her good nature so far as to listen at the door of her mother's bedroom where the discussion was held, to catch a word or two. The first time she went down to the lower floor she heard her father exclaim, 'Then, madame, do you wish to kill your daughter?'

'My poor dear!' said Virginie, in tears, 'papa takes your part.'

'And what do they want to do to Théodore?' asked the innocent girl.

Virginie, inquisitive, went down again; but this time she stayed longer; she learned that Joseph Lebas loved Augustine. It was written that on this memorable day, this house, generally so peaceful, should be a hell. Monsieur Guillaume brought Joseph Lebas to despair by telling him of Augustine's love for a stranger. Lebas, who had advised his friend to become a suitor for Mademoiselle Virginie, saw all his hopes wrecked. Mademoiselle Virginie, overcome by hearing that Joseph had, in a way, refused her, had a sick headache. The dispute that had arisen from the discussion between

Monsieur and Madame Guillaume, when, for the third time in their lives, they had been of antagonistic opinions, had shown itself in a terrible form. Finally, at half-past four in the afternoon, Augustine, pale, trembling, and with red eyes, was haled before her father and mother. The poor child artlessly related the too brief tale of her love. Reassured by a speech from her father, who promised to listen to her in silence, she gathered courage as she pronounced to her parents the name of Théodore de Sommervieux, with a mischievous little emphasis on the aristocratic *de*. And yielding to the unknown charm of talking of her feelings, she was brave enough to declare with innocent decision that she loved Monsieur de Sommervieux, that she had written to him, and she added, with tears in her eyes: 'To sacrifice me to another man would make me wretched.'

'But, Augustine, you cannot surely know what a painter is?' cried her mother with horror.

'Madame Guillaume!' said the old man, compelling her to silence.—'Augustine,' he went on, 'artists are generally little better than beggars. They are too extravagant not to be always a bad sort. I served the late Monsieur Joseph Vernet, the late Monsieur Lekain, and the late Monsieur Noverre. Oh, if you could only know the tricks played on poor Father Chevrel by that Monsieur Noverre, by the Chevalier de Saint-Georges, and especially by Monsieur Philidor! They are a set of rascals; I know them well! They all have a gab and nice manners. Ah, your Monsieur Sumer——, Somm——'

'De Sommervieux, papa.'

'Well, well, de Sommervieux, well and good. He can never have been half so sweet to you as Monsieur le Chevalier de Saint-Georges was to me the day I got a verdict of the consuls against him. And in those days they were gentlemen of quality.'

'But, father, Monsieur Théodore is of good family,

and he wrote me that he is rich; his father was called Chevalier de Sommervieux before the Revolution.'

At these words Monsieur Guillaume looked at his terrible better half, who, like an angry woman, sat tapping the floor with her foot while keeping sullen silence; she avoided even casting wrathful looks at Augustine, appearing to leave to Monsieur Guillaume the whole responsibility in so grave a matter, since her opinion was not listened to. Nevertheless, in spite of her apparent self-control, when she saw her husband giving way so mildly under a catastrophe which had no concern with business, she exclaimed—

'Really, Monsieur, you are so weak with your daughters! However——'

The sound of a carriage, which stopped at the door, interrupted the rating which the old draper already quaked at. In a minute Madame Roquin was standing in the middle of the room, and looking at the actors in this domestic scene: 'I know all, my dear cousin,' said she, with a patronising air.

Madame Roquin made the great mistake of supposing that a Paris notary's wife could play the part of a favourite of fashion.

'I know all,' she repeated, 'and I have come into Noah's Ark, like the dove, with the olive-branch. I read that allegory in the *Génie du Christianisme*,' she added, turning to Madame Guillaume; 'the allusion ought to please you, cousin. Do you know,' she went on, smiling at Augustine, 'that Monsieur de Sommervieux is a charming man? He gave me my portrait this morning, painted by a master's hand. It is worth at least six thousand francs.' And at these words she patted Monsieur Guillaume on the arm. The old draper could not help making a grimace with his lips, which was peculiar to him.

'I know Monsieur de Sommervieux very well,' the Dove ran on. 'He has come to my evenings this fortnight past, and made them delightful. He has told me

all his woes, and commissioned me to plead for him. I know since this morning that he adores Augustine, and he shall have her. Ah, cousin, do not shake your head in refusal. He will be created Baron, I can tell you, and has just been made Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, by the Emperor himself, at the Salon. Roquin is now his lawyer, and knows all his affairs. Well! Monsieur de Sommervieux has twelve thousand francs a year in good landed estate. Do you know that the father-in-law of such a man may get a rise in life—be mayor of his *arrondissement*, for instance. Have we not seen Monsieur Dupont become a Count of the Empire, and a senator, all because he went as mayor to congratulate the Emperor on his entry into Vienna? Oh, this marriage must take place! For my part, I adore the dear young man. His behaviour to Augustine is only met with in romances. Be easy, little one, you shall be happy, and every girl will wish she were in your place. Madame la Duchesse de Carigliano, who comes to my 'At Homes,' raves about Monsieur de Sommervieux. Some spiteful people say she only comes to me to meet him; as if a duchess of yesterday was doing too much honour to a Chevrel, whose family have been respected citizens these hundred years!

'Augustine,' Madame Roquin went on, after a short pause, 'I have seen the portrait. Heavens! How lovely it is!. Do you know that the Emperor wanted to have it? He laughed, and said to the Deputy High Constable that if there were many women like that at his court while all the kings visited it, he should have no difficulty about preserving the peace of Europe. Is not that a compliment?'

The tempests with which the day had begun were to resemble those of nature, by ending in clear and serene weather. Madame Roquin displayed so much address in her harangue, she was able to touch so many strings in the dry hearts of Monsieur and Madame Guillaume, that at last she hit on one which she could work upon. At this

strange period commerce and finance were more than ever possessed by the crazy mania for seeking alliance with rank; and the generals of the Empire took full advantage of this desire. Monsieur Guillaume, as a singular exception, opposed this deplorable craving. His favourite axioms were that, to secure happiness, a woman must marry a man of her own class; that every one was punished sooner or later for having climbed too high; that love could so little endure under the worries of a household, that both husband and wife needed sound good qualities to be happy; that it would not do for one to be far in advance of the other, because, above everything, they must understand each other; if a man spoke Greek and his wife Latin, they might come to die of hunger. He had himself invented this sort of adage. And he compared such marriages to old-fashioned materials of mixed silk and wool, in which the silk always at last wore through the wool. Still, there is so much vanity at the bottom of man's heart that the prudence of the pilot who steered the Cat and Racket so wisely gave way before Madame Roquin's aggressive volubility. Austere Madame Guillaume was the first to see in her daughter's affection a reason for abdicating her principles and for consenting to receive Monsieur de Sommervieux, whom she promised herself she would put under severe inquisition.

The old draper went to look for Joseph Lebas, and inform him of the state of affairs. At half-past six, the dining-room immortalised by the artist saw, united under its skylight, Monsieur and Madame Roquin, the young painter and his charming Augustine, Joseph Lebas, who found his happiness in patience, and Mademoiselle Virginie, convalescent from her headache. Monsieur and Madame Guillaume saw in perspective both their children married, and the fortunes of the Cat and Racket once more in skilful hands. Their satisfaction was at its height when, at dessert, Théodore made them a present of the wonderful picture which they had failed to see,

representing the interior of the old shop, and to which they all owed so much happiness.

'Isn't it pretty!' cried Guillaume. 'And to think that any one would pay thirty thousand francs for that!'

'Because you can see my lappets in it,' said Madame Guillaume.

'And the cloth unrolled!' added Lebas; 'you might take it up in your hand.'

'Drapery always comes out well,' replied the painter. 'We should be only too happy, we modern artists, if we could touch the perfection of antique drapery.'

'So you like drapery!' cried old Guillaume. 'Well, then, by Gad! shake hands on that, my young friend. Since you can respect trade, we shall understand each other. And why should it be despised? The world began with trade, since Adam sold Paradise for an apple. He did not strike a good bargain though!' And the old man roared with honest laughter, encouraged by the champagne, which he sent round with a liberal hand. The band that covered the young artist's eyes was so thick that he thought his future parents amiable. He was not above enlivening them by a few jests in the best taste. So he too pleased every one. In the evening, when the drawing-room, furnished with what Madame Guillaume called 'everything handsome,' was deserted, and while she flitted from the table to the chimney-piece, from the candelabra to the tall candlesticks, hastily blowing out the wax-lights, the worthy draper, who was always clear-sighted when money was in question, called Augustine to him, and seating her on his knee, spoke as follows:—

'My dear child, you shall marry your Sommervieux since you insist; you may, if you like, risk your capital in happiness. But I am not going to be hood-winked by the thirty thousand francs to be made by spoiling good canvas. Money that is lightly earned is lightly spent. Did I not hear that hare-brained youngster declare this evening that money was made round that it

might roll. If it is round for spendthrifts, it is flat for saving folks who pile it up. Now, my child, that fine gentleman talks of giving you carriages and diamonds! He has money, let him spend it on you; so be it. It is no concern of mine. But as to what I can give you, I will not have the crown-pieces I have picked up with so much toil wasted in carriages and frippery. Those who spend too fast never grow rich. A hundred thousand crowns, which is your fortune, will not buy up Paris. It is all very well to look forward to a few hundred thousand francs to be yours some day; I shall keep you waiting for them as long as possible, by Gad! So I took your lover aside, and a man who managed the Lecocq bankruptcy had not much difficulty in persuading the artist to marry under a settlement of his wife's money on herself. I will keep an eye on the marriage contract to see that what he is to settle on you is safely tied up. So now, my child, I hope to be a grandfather, by Gad! I will begin at once to lay up for my grand-children; but swear to me, here and now, never to sign any papers relating to money without my advice; and if I go soon to join old father Chevrel, promise to consult young Lebas, your brother-in-law.'

'Yes, father, I swear it.'

At these words, spoken in a gentle voice, the old man kissed his daughter on both cheeks. That night the lovers slept as soundly as Monsieur and Madame Guillaume.

Some few months after this memorable Sunday the high altar of Saint-Leu was the scene of two very different weddings. Augustine and Théodore appeared in all the radiance of happiness, their eyes beaming with love, dressed with elegance, while a fine carriage waited for them. Virginie, who had come in a good hired fly with the rest of the family, humbly followed her younger sister, dressed in the simplest fashion, like a shadow necessary to the harmony of the picture. Monsieur

Guillaume had exerted himself to the utmost in the church to get Virginie married before Augustine, but the priests, high and low, persisted in addressing the more elegant of the two brides. He heard some of his neighbours highly approving the good sense of Mademoiselle Virginie, who was making, as they said, the more substantial match, and remaining faithful to the neighbourhood; while they fired a few taunts, prompted by envy of Augustine, who was marrying an artist and a man of rank; adding, with a sort of dismay, that if the Guillaumes were ambitious, there was an end to the business. An old fan-maker having remarked that such a prodigal would soon bring his wife to beggary, father Guillaume prided himself *in petto* for his prudence in the matter of marriage settlements. In the evening, after a splendid ball, followed by one of those substantial suppers of which the memory is dying out in the present generation, Monsieur and Madame Guillaume remained in a fine house belonging to them in the Rue du Colombier, where the wedding had been held; Monsieur and Madame Lebas returned in their fly to the old home in the Rue Saint-Denis, to steer the good ship Cat and Racket. The artist, intoxicated with happiness, carried off his beloved Augustine, and eagerly lifting her out of their carriage when it reached the Rue des Trois-Frères, led her to an apartment embellished by all the arts.

The fever of passion which possessed Théodore made a year fly over the young couple without a single cloud to dim the blue sky under which they lived. Life did not hang heavy on the lovers' hands. Théodore lavished on every day inexhaustible *fioriture* of enjoyment, and he delighted to vary the transports of passion by the soft languor of those hours of repose when souls soar so high that they seem to have forgotten all bodily union. Augustine was too happy for reflection; she floated on an undulating tide of rapture; she thought she could not do enough by abandoning herself to sanctioned and sacred

married love; simple and artless, she had no coquetry, no reserves, none of the dominion which a worldly-minded girl acquires over her husband by ingenious caprice; she loved too well to calculate for the future, and never imagined that so exquisite a life could come to an end. Happy in being her husband's sole delight, she believed that her inextinguishable love would always be her greatest grace in his eyes, as her devotion and obedience would be a perennial charm. And, indeed, the ecstasy of love had made her so brilliantly lovely that her beauty filled her with pride, and gave her confidence that she could always reign over a man so easy to kindle as Monsieur de Sommervieux. Thus her position as a wife brought her no knowledge but the lessons of love.

In the midst of her happiness, she was still the simple child who had lived in obscurity in the Rue Saint-Denis, and she never thought of acquiring the manners, the information, the tone of the world she had to live in. Her words being the words of love, she revealed in them, no doubt, a certain pliancy of mind and a certain refinement of speech; but she used the language common to all women when they find themselves plunged in passion, which seems to be their element. When, by chance, Augustine expressed an idea that did not harmonise with Théodore's, the young artist laughed, as we laugh at the first mistakes of a foreigner, though they end by annoying us if they are not corrected.

In spite of all this lovemaking, by the end of this year, as delightful as it was swift, Sommervieux felt one morning the need for resuming his work and his old habits. His wife was expecting their first child. He saw some friends again. During the tedious discomforts of the year when a young wife is nursing an infant for the first time, he worked, no doubt, with zeal, but he occasionally sought diversion in the fashionable world. The house which he was best pleased to frequent was that of the Duchesse de Carigliano, who had at last

attracted the celebrated artist to her parties. When Augustine was quite well again, and her boy no longer required the assiduous care which debars a mother from social pleasures, Théodore had come to the stage of wishing to know the joys of satisfied vanity to be found in society by a man who shows himself with a handsome woman, the object of envy and admiration.

To figure in drawing-rooms with the reflected lustre of her husband's fame, and to find other women envious of her, was to Augustine a new harvest of pleasures; but it was the last gleam of conjugal happiness. She first wounded her husband's vanity when, in spite of vain efforts, she betrayed her ignorance, the inelegance of her language, and the narrowness of her ideas. Sommervieux' nature, subjugated for nearly two years and a half by the first transports of love, now, in the calm of less new possession, recovered its bent and habits, for a while diverted from their channel. Poetry, painting, and the subtle joys of imagination have inalienable rights over a lofty spirit. These cravings of a powerful soul had not been starved in Théodore during these two years; they had only found fresh pasture. As soon as the meadows of love had been ransacked, and the artist had gathered roses and cornflowers as the children do, so greedily that he did not see that his hands could hold no more, the scene changed. When the painter showed his wife the sketches for his finest compositions he heard her exclaim, as her father had done, 'How pretty!' This tepid admiration was not the outcome of conscientious feeling, but of her faith on the strength of love.

Augustine cared more for a look than for the finest picture. The only sublime she knew was that of the heart. At last Théodore could not resist the evidence of the cruel fact—his wife was insensible to poetry, she did not dwell in his sphere, she could not follow him in all his vagaries, his inventions, his joys and his sorrows; she walked grovelling in the world of reality, while his

head was in the skies. Common minds cannot appreciate the perennial sufferings of a being who, while bound to another by the most intimate affections, is obliged constantly to suppress the dearest flights of his soul, and to thrust down into the void those images which a magic power compels him to create. To him the torture is all the more intolerable because his feeling towards his companion enjoins, as its first law, that they should have no concealments, but mingle the aspirations of their thought as perfectly as the effusions of their soul. The demands of nature are not to be cheated. She is as inexorable as necessity, which is, indeed, a sort of social nature. Sommervieux took refuge in the peace and silence of his studio, hoping that the habit of living with artists might mould his wife and develop in her the dormant germs of lofty intelligence which some superior minds suppose must exist in every being. But Augustine was too sincerely religious not to take fright at the tone of artists. At the first dinner Théodore gave, she heard a young painter say, with the childlike lightness, which to her was unintelligible, and which redeems a jest from the taint of profanity, 'But, Madame, your Paradise cannot be more beautiful than Raphael's Transfiguration!—Well, and I got tired of looking at that.'

Thus Augustine came among this sparkling set in a spirit of distrust which no one could fail to see. She was a restraint on their freedom. Now an artist who feels restraint is pitiless; he stays away, or laughs it to scorn. Madame Guillaume, among other absurdities, had an excessive notion of the dignity she considered the prerogative of a married woman; and Augustine, though she had often made fun of it, could not help a slight imitation of her mother's primness. This extreme propriety, which virtuous wives do not always avoid, suggested a few epigrams in the form of sketches, in which the harmless jest was in such good taste that Sommervieux could not take offence; and even if they had been more

severe, these pleasantries were after all only reprisals from his friends. Still, nothing could seem a trifle to a spirit so open as Théodore's to impressions from without. A coldness insensibly crept over him, and inevitably spread. To attain conjugal happiness we must climb a hill whose summit is a narrow ridge, close to a steep and slippery descent: the painter's love was falling down it. He regarded his wife as incapable of appreciating the moral considerations which justified him in his own eyes for his singular behaviour to her, and believed himself quite innocent in hiding from her thoughts she could not enter into, and peccadilloes outside the jurisdiction of a *bourgeois* conscience. Augustine wrapped herself in sullen and silent grief. These unconfessed feelings placed a shroud between the husband and wife which could not fail to grow thicker day by day. Though her husband never failed in consideration for her, Augustine could not help trembling as she saw that he kept for the outer world those treasures of wit and grace that he formerly would lay at her feet. She soon began to find a sinister meaning in the jocular speeches that are current in the world as to the inconstancy of men. She made no complaints, but her demeanour conveyed reproach.

Three years after her marriage this pretty young woman, who dashed past in her handsome carriage, and lived in a sphere of glory and riches to the envy of heedless folk incapable of taking a just view of the situations of life, was a prey to intense grief. She lost her colour; she reflected; she made comparisons; then sorrow unfolded to her the first lessons of experience. She determined to restrict herself bravely within the round of duty, hoping that by this generous conduct she might sooner or later win back her husband's love. But it was not so. When Sommervieux, tired with work, came in from his studio, Augustine did not put away her work so quickly but that the painter might find his wife mending the household linen, and his own, with all the care of a good

housewife. She supplied generously and without a murmur the money needed for his lavishness; but in her anxiety to husband her dear Théodore's fortune, she was strictly economical for herself and in certain details of domestic management. Such conduct is incompatible with the easy-going habits of artists, who, at the end of their life, have enjoyed it so keenly that they never enquire into the causes of their ruin.

It is useless to note every tint of shadow by which the brilliant hues of their honeymoon were overcast till they were lost in utter blackness. One evening poor Augustine, who had for some time heard her husband speak with enthusiasm of the Duchesse de Carigliano, received from a friend certain malignantly charitable warnings as to the nature of the attachment which Sommervieux had formed for this celebrated flirt of the Imperial Court. At one-and-twenty, in all the splendour of youth and beauty, Augustine saw herself deserted for a woman of six-and-thirty. Feeling herself so wretched in the midst of a world of festivity which to her was a blank, the poor little thing could no longer understand the admiration she excited, or the envy of which she was the object. Her face assumed a different expression. Melancholy tinged her features with the sweetness of resignation and the pallor of scorned love. Ere long she too was courted by the most fascinating men; but she remained lonely and virtuous. Some contemptuous words which escaped her husband filled her with incredible despair. A sinister flash showed her the breaches which, as a result of her sordid education, hindered the perfect union of her soul with Théodore's; she loved him well enough to absolve him and condemn herself. She shed tears of blood, and perceived, too late, that there are *mésalliances* of the spirit as well as of rank and habits. As she recalled the early raptures of their union, she understood the full extent of that lost happiness, and accepted the conclusion that so rich a harvest of love was

in itself a whole life, which only sorrow could pay for. At the same time, she loved too truly to lose all hope. At one-and-twenty she dared undertake to educate herself, and make her imagination, at least, worthy of that she admired. 'If I am not a poet,' thought she, 'at any rate, I will understand poetry.'

Then, with all the strength of will, all the energy which every woman can display when she loves, Madame de Sommervieux tried to alter her character, her manners, and her habits; but by dint of devouring books and learning undauntedly, she only succeeded in becoming less ignorant. Lightness of wit and the graces of conversation are a gift of nature, or the fruit of education begun in the cradle. She could appreciate music and enjoy it, but she could not sing with taste. She understood literature and the beauties of poetry, but it was too late to cultivate her refractory memory. She listened with pleasure to social conversation, but she could contribute nothing brilliant. Her religious notions and home-grown prejudices were antagonistic to the complete emancipation of her intelligence. Finally, a foregone conclusion against her had stolen into Théodore's mind, and this she could not conquer. The artist would laugh at those who flattered him about his wife, and his irony had some foundation; he so overawed the pathetic young creature that, in his presence, or alone with him, she trembled. Hampered by her too eager desire to please, her wits and her knowledge vanished in one absorbing feeling. Even her fidelity vexed the unfaithful husband, who seemed to bid her do wrong by stigmatising her virtue as insensibility. Augustine tried in vain to abdicate her reason, to yield to her husband's caprices and whims, to devote herself to the selfishness of his vanity. Her sacrifices bore no fruit. Perhaps they had both let the moment slip when souls may meet in comprehension. One day the young wife's too sensitive heart received one of those blows which so strain the bonds of feeling that they seem

to be broken. She withdrew into solitude. But before long a fatal idea suggested to her to seek counsel and comfort in the bosom of her family.

So one morning she made her way towards the grotesque façade of the humble, silent home where she had spent her childhood. She sighed as she looked up at the sash-window, whence one day she had sent her first kiss to him who now shed as much sorrow as glory on her life. Nothing was changed in the cavern, where the drapery business had, however, started on a new life. Augustine's sister filled her mother's old place at the desk. The unhappy young woman met her brother-in-law with his pen behind his ear; he hardly listened to her, he was so full of business. The formidable symptoms of stock-taking were visible all round him; he begged her to excuse him. She was received coldly enough by her sister, who owed her a grudge. In fact, Augustine, in her finery, and stepping out of a handsome carriage, had never been to see her but when passing by. The wife of the prudent Lebas, imagining that want of money was the prime cause of this early call, tried to keep up a tone of reserve which more than once made Augustine smile. The painter's wife perceived that, apart from the cap and lappets, her mother had found in Virginie a successor who could uphold the ancient honour of the Cat and Racket. At breakfast she observed certain changes in the management of the house which did honour to Lebas' good sense; the assistants did not rise before dessert; they were allowed to talk, and the abundant meal spoke of ease without luxury. The fashionable woman found some tickets for a box at the Français, where she remembered having seen her sister from time to time. Madame Lebas had a cashmere shawl over her shoulders, of which the value bore witness to her husband's generosity to her. In short, the couple were keeping pace with the times. During the two-thirds of the day she spent there, Augustine was touched to the heart by

the equable happiness, devoid, to be sure, of all emotion, but equally free from storms, enjoyed by this well-matched couple. They had accepted life as a commercial enterprise, in which, above all, they must do credit to the business. Not finding any great love in her husband, Virginie had set to work to create it. Having by degrees learned to esteem and care for his wife, the time that his happiness had taken to germinate was to Joseph Lebas a guarantee of its durability. Hence, when Augustine plaintively set forth her painful position, she had to face the deluge of commonplace morality which the traditions of the Rue Saint-Denis furnished to her sister.

'The mischief is done, wife,' said Joseph Lebas; 'we must try to give our sister good advice.' Then the clever tradesman ponderously analysed the resources which law and custom might offer Augustine as a means of escape at this crisis; he ticketed every argument, so to speak, and arranged them in their degrees of weight under various categories, as though they were articles of merchandise of different qualities; then he put them in the scale, weighed them, and ended by showing the necessity for his sister-in-law's taking violent steps which could not satisfy the love she still had for her husband; and, indeed, the feeling had revived in all its strength when she heard Joseph Lebas speak of legal proceedings. Augustine thanked them, and returned home even more undecided than she had been before consulting them. She now ventured to go to the house in the Rue du Colombier, intending to confide her troubles to her father and mother; for she was like a sick man who, in his desperate plight, tries every prescription, and even puts faith in old wives' remedies.

The old people received their daughter with an effusiveness that touched her deeply. Her visit brought them some little change, and that to them was worth a fortune. For the last four years they had gone their way in life like navigators without a goal or a compass. Sitting by the

chimney corner, they would talk over their disasters under the old law of *maximum*, of their great investments in cloth, of the way they had weathered bankruptcies, and, above all, the famous failure of Lecocq, Monsieur Guillaume's battle of Marengo. Then, when they had exhausted the tale of lawsuits, they recapitulated the sums total of their most profitable stock-takings, and told each other old stories of the Saint-Denis quarter. At two o'clock old Guillaume went to cast an eye on the business at the Cat and Racket; on his way back he called at all the shops, formerly the rivals of his own, where the young proprietors hoped to inveigle the old draper into some risky discount, which, as was his wont, he never refused point-blank. Two good Normandy horses were dying of their own fat in the stables of the big house; Madame Guillaume never used them but to drag her on Sundays to high mass at the parish church. Three times a week the worthy couple kept open house. By the influence of his son-in-law Sommervieux, Monsieur Guillaume had been named a member of the Consulting Board for the Clothing of the Army. Since her husband had stood so high in office, Madame Guillaume had decided that she must receive; her rooms were so crammed with gold and silver ornaments, and furniture, tasteless but of undoubted value, that the simplest room in the house looked like a chapel. Economy and expense seemed to be struggling for the upper hand in every accessory. It was as though Monsieur Guillaume had looked to a good investment, even in the purchase of a candlestick. In the midst of this bazaar, where splendour revealed the owners' want of occupation, Sommervieux' famous picture filled the place of honour, and in it Monsieur and Madame Guillaume found their chief consolation, turning their eyes, harnessed with eye-glasses, twenty times a day on this presentment of their past life, to them so active and amusing. The appearance of this mansion and these rooms, where everything had an aroma of staleness and mediocrity, the

spectacle offered by these two beings, cast away, as it were, on a rock far from the world and the ideas which are life, startled Augustine; she could here contemplate the sequel of the scene of which the first part had struck her at the house of Lebas—a life of stir without movement, a mechanical and instinctive existence like that of the beaver; and then she felt an indefinable pride in her troubles, as she reflected that they had their source in eighteen months of such happiness as, in her eyes, was worth a thousand lives like this; its vacuity seemed to her horrible. However, she concealed this not very charitable feeling, and displayed for her parents her newly-acquired accomplishments of mind, and the ingratiating tenderness that love had revealed to her, disposing them to listen to her matrimonial grievances. Old people have a weakness for this kind of confidences. Madame Guillaume wanted to know the most trivial details of that alien life, which to her seemed almost fabulous. The travels of Baron de la Houtan, which she began again and again and never finished, told her nothing more unheard-of concerning the Canadian savages.

'What, child, your husband shuts himself into a room with naked women! And you are so simple as to believe that he draws them?'

As she uttered this exclamation, the grandmother laid her spectacles on a little work-table, shook her skirts, and clasped her hands on her knees, raised by a foot-warmer, her favourite pedestal.

'But, mother, all artists are obliged to have models.'

'He took good care not to tell us that when he asked leave to marry you. If I had known it, I would never have given my daughter to a man who followed such a trade. Religion forbids such horrors; they are immoral. And at what time of night do you say he comes home?'

'At one o'clock—two——'

The old folks looked at each other in utter amazement.

'Then he gambles?' said Monsieur Guillaume. 'In my day only gamblers stayed out so late.'

Augustine made a face that scorned the accusation,

'He must keep you up through dreadful nights waiting for him,' said Madame Guillaume. 'But you go to bed, don't you? And when he has lost, the wretch wakes you.'

'No, mamma, on the contrary, he is sometimes in very good spirits. Not unfrequently, indeed, when it is fine, he suggests that I should get up and go into the woods.'

'The woods! At that hour? Then have you such a small set of rooms that his bedroom and his sitting rooms are not enough, and that he must run about? But it is just to give you cold that the wretch proposes such expeditions. He wants to get rid of you. Did one ever hear of a man settled in life, a well-behaved, quiet man galloping about like a warlock?'

'But, my dear mother, you do not understand that he must have excitement to fire his genius. He is fond of scenes which——'

'I would make scenes for him, fine scenes!' cried Madame Guillaume, interrupting her daughter. 'How can you show any consideration to such a man? In the first place, I don't like his drinking water only; it is not wholesome. Why does he object to see a woman eating? What queer notion is that! But he is mad. All you tell us about him is impossible. A man cannot leave his home without a word, and never come back for ten days. And then he tells you he has been to Dieppe to paint the sea. As if any one painted the sea! He crams you with a pack of tales that are too absurd.'

Augustine opened her lips to defend her husband; but Madame Guillaume enjoined silence with a wave of her hand, which she obeyed by a survival of habit, and her mother went on in harsh tones: 'Don't talk to me about the man! He never set foot in a church excepting to see you and to be married. People without religion are capable of anything. Did Guillaume ever dream of hiding anything from me, of spending three days without

saying a word to me, and of chattering afterwards like a blind magpie?'

'My dear mother, you judge superior people too severely. If their ideas were the same as other folks', they would not be men of genius.'

'Very well, then let men of genius stop at home and not get married. What! A man of genius is to make his wife miserable? And because he is a genius it is all right! Genius, genius! It is not so very clever to say black one minute and white the next, as he does, to interrupt other people, to dance such rigs at home, never to let you know which foot you are to stand on, to compel his wife never to be amused unless my lord is in gay spirits, and to be dull when he is dull.'

'But, mother, the very nature of such imaginations——'

'What are such "imaginations"?' Madame Guillaume went on, interrupting her daughter again. 'Fine ones his are, my word! What possesses a man that all on a sudden, without consulting a doctor, he takes it into his head to eat nothing but vegetables? If indeed it were from religious motives, it might do him some good—but he has no more religion than a Huguenot. Was there ever a man known who, like him, loved horses better than his fellow-creatures, had his hair curled like a heathen, laid statues under muslin coverlets, shut his shutters in broad day to work by lamp-light? There, get along; if he were not so grossly immoral, he would be fit to shut up in a lunatic asylum. Consult Monsieur Loraux, the priest at Saint Sulpice, ask his opinion about it all, and he will tell you that your husband does not behave like a Christian.'

'Oh, mother, can you believe——?'

'Yes, I do believe. You loved him, and you can see none of these things. But I can remember in the early days after your marriage. I met him in the Champs-Elysées. He was on horseback. Well, at one minute he was galloping as hard as he could tear, and then

pulled up to a walk. I said to myself at that moment, "There is a man devoid of judgment."'

'Ah, ha!' cried Monsieur Guillaume, 'how wise I was to have your money settled on yourself with such a queer fellow for a husband!'

When Augustine was so imprudent as to set forth her serious grievances against her husband, the two old people were speechless with indignation. But the word 'divorce' was ere long spoken by Madame Guillaume. At the sound of the word divorce the apathetic old draper seemed to wake up. Prompted by his love for his daughter, and also by the excitement which the proceedings would bring into his uneventful life, father Guillaume took up the matter. He made himself the leader of the application for a divorce, laid down the lines of it, almost argued the case; he offered to be at all the charges, to see the lawyers, the pleaders, the judges, to move heaven and earth. Madame de Sommervieux was frightened, she refused her father's services, said she would not be separated from her husband even if she were ten times as unhappy, and talked no more about her sorrows. After being overwhelmed by her parents with all the little wordless and consoling kindnesses by which the old couple tried in vain to make up to her for her distress of heart, Augustine went away, feeling the impossibility of making a superior mind intelligible to weak intellects. She had learned that a wife must hide from every one, even from her parents, woes for which it is so difficult to find sympathy. The storms and sufferings of the upper spheres are appreciated only by the lofty spirits who inhabit there. In every circumstance we can only be judged by our equals.

Thus poor Augustine found herself thrown back on the horror of her meditations, in the cold atmosphere of her home. Study was indifferent to her, since study had not brought her back her husband's heart. Initiated into the secret of these souls of fire, but bereft of their resources,

she was compelled to share their sorrows without sharing their pleasures. She was disgusted with the world, which to her seemed mean and small as compared with the incidents of passion. In short, her life was a failure.

One evening an idea flashed upon her that lighted up her dark grief like a beam from heaven. Such an idea could never have smiled on a heart less pure, less virtuous than hers. She determined to go to the Duchesse de Carigliano, not to ask her to give her back her husband's heart, but to learn the arts by which it had been captured; to engage the interest of this haughty fine lady for the mother of her lover's children; to appeal to her and make her the instrument of her future happiness, since she was the cause of her present wretchedness.

So one day Augustine, timid as she was, but armed with supernatural courage, got into her carriage at two in the afternoon to try for admittance to the boudoir of the famous coquette, who was never visible till that hour. Madame de Sommervieux had not yet seen any of the ancient and magnificent mansions of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. As she made her way through the stately corridors, the handsome staircases, the vast drawing-rooms —full of flowers, though it was in the depth of winter, and decorated with the taste peculiar to women born to opulence or to the elegant habits of the aristocracy, Augustine felt a terrible clutch at her heart; she coveted the secrets of an elegance of which she had never had an idea; she breathed an air of grandeur which explained the attraction of the house for her husband. When she reached the private rooms of the Duchesse she was filled with jealousy and a sort of despair, as she admired the luxurious arrangement of the furniture, the draperies and the hangings. Here disorder was a grace, here luxury affected a certain contempt of splendour. The fragrance that floated in the warm air flattered the sense of smell without offending it. The accessories of the rooms were in harmony with a view, through plate-glass windows, of

the lawns in a garden planted with evergreen trees. It was all bewitching, and the art of it was not perceptible. The whole spirit of the mistress of these rooms pervaded the drawing-room where Augustine awaited her. She tried to divine her rival's character from the aspect of the scattered objects; but there was here something as impenetrable in the disorder as in the symmetry, and to the simple-minded young wife all was a sealed letter. All that she could discern was that, as a woman, the Duchesse was a superior person. Then a painful thought came over her.

'Alas! And is it true,' she wondered, 'that a simple and loving heart is not all-sufficient to an artist; that to balance the weight of these powerful souls they need a union with feminine souls of a strength equal to their own? If I had been brought up like this siren, our weapons at least might have been equal in the hour of struggle.'

'But I am not at home!' The sharp, harsh words, though spoken in an undertone in the adjoining boudoir, were heard by Augustine, and her heart beat violently.

'The lady is in there,' replied the maid.

'You are an idiot! Show her in,' replied the Duchesse, whose voice was sweeter, and had assumed the dulcet tones of politeness. She evidently now meant to be heard.

Augustine shyly entered the room. At the end of the dainty boudoir she saw the Duchesse lounging luxuriously on an ottoman covered with brown velvet and placed in the centre of a sort of apse outlined by soft folds of white muslin over a yellow lining. Ornaments of gilt bronze, arranged with exquisite taste, enhanced this sort of daïs, under which the Duchesse reclined like a Greek statue. The dark hue of the velvet gave relief to every fascinating charm. A subdued light, friendly to her beauty, fell like a reflection rather than a direct illumination. A few rare flowers raised their perfumed heads from costly Sèvres

vases. At the moment when this picture was presented to Augustine's astonished eyes, she was approaching so noiselessly that she caught a glance from those of the enchantress. This look seemed to say to some one whom Augustine did not at first perceive, 'Stay; you will see a pretty woman, and make her visit less of a bore.'

On seeing Augustine, the Duchesse rose and made her sit down by her.

'And to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit, madame?' she said with a most gracious smile.

'Why all this falseness?' thought Augustine, replying only with a bow.

Her silence was compulsory. The young woman saw before her a superfluous witness of the scene. This personage was, of all the Colonels in the army, the youngest, the most fashionable, and the finest man. His face, full of life and youth, but already expressive, was further enhanced by a small moustache twirled up into points, and as black as jet, by a full imperial, by whiskers carefully combed, and a forest of black hair in some disorder. He was whisking a riding whip with an air of ease and freedom which suited his self-satisfied expression and the elegance of his dress; the ribbons attached to his buttonhole were carelessly tied, and he seemed to pride himself much more on his smart appearance than on his courage. Augustine looked at the Duchesse de Carigliano, and indicated the Colonel by a sidelong glance. All its mute appeal was understood.

'Good-bye, then, Monsieur d'Aiglemont, we shall meet in the Bois de Boulogne.'

These words were spoken by the siren as though they were the result of an agreement made before Augustine's arrival, and she winged them with a threatening look that the officer deserved perhaps for the admiration he showed in gazing at the modest flower, which contrasted so well with the haughty Duchesse. The young fop bowed in silence, turned on the heels of his boots, and

gracefully quitted the boudoir. At this instant, Augustine, watching her rival, whose eyes seemed to follow the brilliant officer, detected in that glance a sentiment of which the transient expression is known to every woman. She perceived with the deepest anguish that her visit would be useless; this lady, full of artifice, was too greedy of homage not to have a ruthless heart.

'Madame,' said Augustine in a broken voice, 'the step I am about to take will seem to you very strange; but there is a madness of despair which ought to excuse anything. I understand only too well why Théodore prefers your house to any other, and why your mind has so much power over his. Alas! I have only to look into myself to find more than ample reasons. But I am devoted to my husband, madame. Two years of tears have not effaced his image from my heart, though I have lost his. In my folly I dared to dream of a contest with you; and I have come to you to ask you by what means I may triumph over yourself. Oh, madame,' cried the young wife, ardently seizing the hand which her rival allowed her to hold, 'I will never pray to God for my own happiness with so much fervour as I will beseech him for yours, if you will help me to win back Sommervieux's regard—I will not say his love. I have no hope but in you. Ah! tell me how you could please him, and make him forget the first days——' At these words Augustine broke down, suffocated with sobs she could not suppress. Ashamed of her weakness, she hid her face in her handkerchief, which she bathed with tears.

'What a child you are, my dear little beauty!' said the Duchesse, carried away by the novelty of such a scene, and touched, in spite of herself, at receiving such homage from the most perfect virtue perhaps in Paris. She took the young wife's handkerchief, and herself wiped the tears from her eyes, soothing her by a few monosyllables murmured with gracious compassion. After a moment's silence the Duchesse, grasping poor Augustine's hands in

both her own—hands that had a rare character of dignity and powerful beauty—said in a gentle and friendly voice: 'My first warning is to advise you not to weep so bitterly; tears are disfiguring. We must learn to deal firmly with the sorrows that make us ill, for love does not linger long by a sickbed. Melancholy, at first, no doubt, lends a certain attractive grace, but it ends by dragging the features and blighting the loveliest face. And besides, our tyrants are so vain as to insist that their slaves should be always cheerful.'

'But, madame, it is not in my power not to feel. How is it possible, without suffering a thousand deaths, to see the face which once beamed with love and gladness turn chill, colourless, and indifferent? I cannot control my heart!'

'So much the worse, sweet child. But I fancy I know all your story. In the first place, if your husband is unfaithful to you, understand clearly that I am not his accomplice. If I was anxious to have him in my drawing-room, it was, I own, out of vanity; he was famous, and he went nowhere. I like you too much already to tell you all the mad things he has done for my sake. I will only reveal one, because it may perhaps help us to bring him back to you, and to punish him for the audacity of his behaviour to me. He will end by compromising me. I know the world too well, my dear, to abandon myself to the discretion of a too superior man. You should know that one may allow them to court one, but marry them—that is a mistake! We women ought to admire men of genius, and delight in them as a spectacle, but as to living with them? Never.—No, no. It is like wanting to find pleasure in inspecting the machinery of the Opera instead of sitting in a box to enjoy its brilliant illusions. But this misfortune has fallen on you, my poor child, has it not? Well, then, you must try to arm yourself against tyranny.'

'Ah, madame, before coming in here, only seeing you

as I came in; I already detected some arts of which I had no suspicion.'

'Well, come and see me sometimes, and it will not be long before you have mastered the knowledge of these trifles, important, too, in their way. Outward things are, to fools, half of life; and in that matter more than one clever man is a fool, in spite of all his talent. But I dare wager you never could refuse your Théodore anything!'

'How refuse anything, madame, if one loves a man?'

'Poor innocent, I could adore you for your simplicity. You should know that the more we love the less we should allow a man, above all, a husband, to see the whole extent of our passion. The one who loves most is tyrannised over, and, which is worse, is sooner or later neglected. The one who wishes to rule should——'

'What, madame, must I then dissimulate, calculate, become false, form an artificial character, and live in it? How is it possible to live in such a way? Can you——' she hesitated; the Duchesse smiled.

'My dear child,' the great lady went on in a serious tone, 'conjugal happiness has in all times been a speculation, a business demanding particular attention. If you persist in talking passion while I am talking marriage, we shall soon cease to understand each other. Listen to me,' she went on, assuming a confidential tone. 'I have been in the way of seeing some of the superior men of our day. Those who have married have for the most part chosen quite insignificant wives. Well, those wives governed them, as the Emperor governs us; and if they were not loved, they were at least respected. I like secrets—especially those which concern women—well enough to have amused myself by seeking the clue to the riddle. Well, my sweet child, those worthy women had the gift of analysing their husbands' nature; instead of taking fright, like you, at their superiority, they very acutely noted the qualities they lacked, and either by possessing those qualities, or by feigning to possess them,

they found means of making such a handsome display of them in their husbands' eyes that in the end they impressed them. Also, I must tell you, all these souls which appear so lofty have just a speck of madness in them, which we ought to know how to take advantage of. By firmly resolving to have the upper hand and never deviating from that aim, by bringing all our actions to bear on it, all our ideas, our cajolery, we subjugate these eminently capricious natures, which, by the very mutability of their thoughts, lend us the means of influencing them.'

'Good heavens!' cried the young wife in dismay. 'And this is life. It is a warfare——'

'In which we must always threaten,' said the Duchesse, laughing. 'Our power is wholly factitious. And we must never allow a man to despise us; it is impossible to recover from such a descent but by odious manœuvring. Come,' she added, 'I will give you a means of bringing your husband to his senses.'

She rose with a smile to guide the young and guileless apprentice to conjugal arts through the labyrinth of her palace. They came to a back-staircase, which led up to the reception rooms. As Madame de Carigliano pressed the secret spring-lock of the door she stopped, looking at Augustine with an inimitable gleam of shrewdness and grace. 'The Duc de Carigliano adores me,' said she. 'Well, he dare not enter by this door without my leave. And he is a man in the habit of commanding thousands of soldiers. He knows how to face a battery, but before me—he is afraid!'

Augustine sighed. They entered a sumptuous gallery, where the painter's wife was led by the Duchesse up to the portrait painted by Théodore of Mademoiselle Guillaume. On seeing it, Augustine uttered a cry.

'I knew it was no longer in my house,' she said, 'but—here!——'

'My dear child, I asked for it merely to see what

pitch of idiocy a man of genius may attain to. Sooner or later I should have returned it to you, for I never expected the pleasure of seeing the original here face to face with the copy. While we finish our conversation I will have it carried down to your carriage. And if, armed with such a talisman, you are not your husband's mistress for a hundred years, you are not a woman, and you deserve your fate.'

Augustine kissed the Duchesse's hand, and the lady clasped her to her heart, with all the more tenderness because she would forget her by the morrow. This scene might perhaps have destroyed for ever the candour and purity of a less virtuous woman than Augustine, for the astute politics of the higher social spheres were no more consonant to Augustine than the narrow reasoning of Joseph Lebas, or Madame Guillaume's vapid morality. Strange are the results of the false positions into which we may be brought by the slightest mistake in the conduct of life! Augustine was like an Alpine cowherd surprised by an avalanche; if he hesitates, if he listens to the shouts of his comrades, he is almost certainly lost. In such a crisis the heart steels itself or breaks.

Madame de Sommervieux returned home a prey to such agitation as it is difficult to describe. Her conversation with the Duchesse de Carigliano had roused in her mind a crowd of contradictory thoughts Like the sheep in the fable, full of courage in the wolf's absence, she preached to herself, and laid down admirable plans of conduct; she devised a thousand coquettish stratagems; she even talked to her husband, finding, away from him, all the springs of true eloquence which never desert a woman; then, as she pictured to herself Théodore's clear and steadfast gaze, she began to quake. When she asked whether Monsieur were at home her voice shook. On learning that he would not be in to dinner, she felt an unaccountable thrill of joy. Like a criminal who

has appealed against sentence of death, a respite, however short, seemed to her a lifetime. She placed the portrait in her room, and waited for her husband in all the agonies of hope. That this venture must decide her future life, she felt too keenly not to shiver at every sound, even the low ticking of the clock, which seemed to aggravate her terrors by doling them out to her. She tried to cheat time by various devices. The idea struck her of dressing in a way which would make her exactly like the portrait. Then, knowing her husband's restless temper, she had her room lighted up with unusual brightness, feeling sure that when he came in curiosity would bring him there at once. Midnight had struck when, at the call of the groom, the street gate was opened, and the artist's carriage rumbled in over the stones of the silent courtyard.

'What is the meaning of this illumination?' asked Théodore in glad tones, as he came into her room.

Augustine skilfully seized the auspicious moment; she threw herself into her husband's arms, and pointed to the portrait. The artist stood rigid as a rock, and his eyes turned alternately on Augustine, on the accusing dress. The frightened wife, half-dead, as she watched her husband's changeful brow—that terrible brow—saw the expressive furrows gathering like clouds; then she felt her blood curdling in her veins when, with a glaring look, and in a deep hollow voice, he began to question her—

'"Where did you find that picture?"

'The Duchesse de Carigliano returned it to me.'

'You asked her for it?'

'I did not know that she had it.'

The gentleness, or rather the exquisite sweetness of this angel's voice, might have touched a cannibal, but not an artist in the clutches of wounded vanity.

'It is worthy of her!' exclaimed the painter in a voice of thunder. 'I will be revenged!' he cried, strid-

ing up and down the room. 'She shall die of shame; I will paint her! Yes, I will paint her as Messalina stealing out at night from the palace of Claudius.'

'Théodore!' said a faint voice.

'I will kill her!'

'My dear——'

'She is in love with that little cavalry colonel, because he rides well——'

'Théodore!'

'Let me be!' said the painter in a tone almost like a roar.

It would be odious to describe the whole scene. In the end the frenzy of passion prompted the artist to acts and words which any woman not so young as Augustine would have ascribed to madness.

At eight o'clock next morning Madame Guillaume, surprising her daughter, found her pale, with red eyes, her hair in disorder, holding a handkerchief soaked with tears, while she gazed at the floor strewn with the torn fragments of a dress and the broken pieces of a large gilt picture-frame. Augustine, almost senseless with grief, pointed to the wreck with a gesture of deep despair.

'I don't know that the loss is very great!' cried the old mistress of the Cat and Racket. 'It was like you, no doubt; but I am told that there is a man on the Boulevard who paints lovely portraits for fifty crowns.'

'Oh, mother!'

'Poor child, you are quite right,' replied Madame Guillaume, who misinterpreted the expression of her daughter's glance at her. 'True, my child, no one ever can love you as fondly as a mother. My darling, I guess it all; but confide your sorrows to me, and I will comfort you. Did I not tell you long ago that the man was mad! Your maid has told me pretty stories. Why, he must be a perfect monster!'

Augustine laid a finger on her white lips, as if to implore a moment's silence. During this dreadful night

misery had led her to that patient resignation which in mothers and loving wives transcends in its effects all human energy, and perhaps reveals in the heart of women the existence of certain chords which God has withheld from men.

An inscription engraved on a broken column in the cemetery at Montmartre states that Madame de Sommervieux died at the age of twenty-seven. In the simple words of this epitaph one of the timid creature's friends can read the last scene of a tragedy. Every year, on the second of November, the solemn day of the dead, he never passes this youthful monument without wondering whether it does not need a stronger woman than Augustine to endure the violent embrace of genius?

'The humble and modest flowers that bloom in the valley,' he reflects, 'perish perhaps when they are transplanted too near the skies, to the region where storms gather and the sun is scorching.'

THE SCEAUX BALL

(*Le Bal de Sceaux*).

To Henri de Balzac, his brother Honoré.

THE Comte de Fontaine, head of one of the oldest families in Poitou, had served the Bourbon cause with intelligence and bravery during the war in La Vendée against the Republic. After having escaped all the dangers which threatened the royalist leaders during this stormy period of modern history, he was wont to say in jest, 'I am one of the men who gave themselves to be killed on the steps of the throne.' And the pleasantry had some truth in it, as spoken by a man left for dead at the bloody battle of Les Quatre Chemins. Though ruined by confiscation, the staunch Vendéen steadily refused the lucrative posts offered to him by the Emperor Napoleon. Immovable in his aristocratic faith, he had blindly obeyed its precepts when he thought it fitting to choose a companion for life. In spite of the blandishments of a rich but revolutionary parvenu, who valued the alliance at a high figure, he married Mademoiselle de Kergarouët, without a fortune, but belonging to one of the oldest families in Brittany.

When the second revolution burst on Monsieur de Fontaine he was encumbered with a large family. Though it was no part of the noble gentleman's views to solicit favours, he yielded to his wife's wish, left his country-estate, of which the income barely sufficed to maintain

his children, and came to Paris. Saddened by seeing the greediness of his former comrades in the rush for places and dignities under the new Constitution, he was about to return to his property when he received a ministerial despatch, in which a well-known magnate announced to him his nomination as *maréchal de camp*, or brigadier-general, under a rule which allowed the officers of the Catholic armies to count the twenty submerged years of Louis XVIII.'s reign as years of service. Some days later he further received, without any solicitation, *ex officio*, the crosses of the Legion of Honour and of Saint-Louis.

Shaken in his determination by these successive favours, due, as he supposed, to the monarch's remembrance, he was no longer satisfied with taking his family, as he had piously done every Sunday, to cry 'Vive le Roi' in the hall of the Tuileries when the royal family passed through on their way to chapel; he craved the favour of a private audience. The audience, at once granted, was in no sense private. The royal drawing-room was full of old adherents, whose powdered heads, seen from above, suggested a carpet of snow. There the Comte met some old friends, who received him somewhat coldly; but the princes he thought *adorable*, an enthusiastic expression which escaped him when the most gracious of his masters, to whom the Comte had supposed himself to be known only by name, came to shake hands with him, and spoke of him as the most thorough Vendeen of them all. Notwithstanding this ovation, none of these august persons thought of inquiring as to the sum of his losses, or of the money he had poured so generously into the chests of the Catholic regiments. He discovered, a little late, that he had made war at his own cost. Towards the end of the evening he thought he might venture on a witty allusion to the state of his affairs, similar, as it was, to that of many other gentlemen. His Majesty laughed heartily enough; any speech that bore the hall-mark of wit was certain to please him; but he nevertheless replied

with one of those royal pleasantries whose sweetness is more formidable than the anger of a rebuke. One of the King's most intimate advisers took an opportunity of going up to the fortune-seeking Vendéen, and made him understand by a keen and polite hint that the time had not yet come for settling accounts with the sovereign; that there were bills of much longer standing than his on the books, and there, no doubt, they would remain, as part of the history of the Revolution. The Count prudently withdrew from the venerable group, which formed a respectful semicircle before the august family; then, having extricated his sword, not without some difficulty, from among the lean legs which had got mixed up with it, he crossed the courtyard of the Tuileries and got into the hackney cab he had left on the quay. With the restive spirit, which is peculiar to the nobility of the old school, in whom still survives the memory of the League and the day of the Barricades (in 1588), he bewailed himself in his cab, loudly enough to compromise him, over the change that had come over the Court. 'Formerly,' he said to himself, 'every one could speak freely to the King of his own little affairs; the nobles could ask him a favour, or for money, when it suited them, and nowadays one cannot recover the money advanced for his service without raising a scandal! By Heaven! the cross of Saint-Louis and the rank of brigadier-general will not make good the three hundred thousand livres I have spent, out and out, on the royal cause. I must speak to the King, face to face, in his own room.'

This scene cooled Monsieur de Fontaine's ardour all the more effectually because his requests for an interview were never answered. And, indeed, he saw the upstarts of the Empire obtaining some of the offices reserved, under the old monarchy, for the highest families.

'All is lost!' he exclaimed one morning. 'The King has certainly never been other than a revolutionary. But for Monsieur, who never derogates, and is some comfort

to his faithful adherents, I do not know what hands the crown of France might not fall into if things are to go on like this. Their cursed constitutional system is the worst possible government, and can never suit France. Louis XVIII. and Monsieur Beugnot spoiled everything at Saint Ouen.'

The Count, in despair, was preparing to retire to his estate, abandoning, with dignity, all claims to repayment. At this moment the events of the 20th March (1815) gave warning of a fresh storm, threatening to overwhelm the legitimate monarch and his defenders. Monsieur de Fontaine, like one of those generous souls who do not dismiss a servant in a torrent of rain, borrowed on his lands to follow the routed monarchy, without knowing whether this complicity in emigration would prove more propitious to him than his past devotion. But when he perceived that the companions of the King's exile were in higher favour than the brave men who had protested, sword in hand, against the establishment of the republic, he may perhaps have hoped to derive greater profit from this journey into a foreign land than from active and dangerous service in the heart of his own country. Nor was his courtier-like calculation one of those rash speculations which promise splendid results on paper, and are ruinous in effect. He was—to quote the wittiest and most successful of our diplomates—one of the faithful five hundred who shared the exile of the Court at Ghent, and one of the fifty thousand who returned with it. During the short banishment of royalty, Monsieur de Fontaine was so happy as to be employed by Louis XVIII., and found more than one opportunity of giving him proofs of great political honesty and sincere attachment. One evening, when the King had nothing better to do, he recalled Monsieur de Fontaine's witticism at the Tuileries. The old Vendéen did not let such a happy chance slip; he told his history with so much vivacity that a king, who never forgot anything, might remember it at a convenient

season. The royal amateur of literature also observed the elegant style given to some notes which the discreet gentleman had been invited to recast. This little success stamped Monsieur de Fontaine on the King's memory as one of the loyal servants of the Crown.

At the second restoration the Count was one of those special envoys who were sent throughout the departments charged with absolute jurisdiction over the leaders of revolt; but he used his terrible powers with moderation. As soon as this temporary commission was ended, the High Provost found a seat in the Privy Council, became a deputy, spoke little, listened much, and changed his opinions very considerably. Certain circumstances, unknown to historians, brought him into such intimate relations with the Sovereign, that one day, as he came in, the shrewd monarch addressed him thus: 'My friend Fontaine, I shall take care never to appoint you to be director-general, or minister. Neither you nor I, as employés, could keep our place on account of our opinions. Representative government has this advantage: it saves Us the trouble We used to have, of dismissing Our Secretaries of State. Our Council is a perfect inn-parlour, whither public opinion sometimes sends strange travellers; however, We can always find a place for Our faithful adherents.'

This ironical speech was introductory to a rescript giving Monsieur de Fontaine an appointment as administrator in the office of Crown lands. As a consequence of the intelligent attention with which he listened to his royal Friend's sarcasms, his name always rose to his Majesty's lips when a commission was to be appointed of which the members were to receive a handsome salary. He had the good sense to hold his tongue about the favour with which he was honoured, and knew how to entertain the monarch in those familiar chats in which Louis XVIII. delighted as much as in a well-written note, by his brilliant manner of repeating political anecdotes, and the political or parliamentary tittle-tattle—if the expression

may pass—which at that time was rife. It is well known that he was immensely amused by every detail of his *Gouvernementabilité*—a word adopted by his facetious Majesty.

Thanks to the Comte de Fontaine's good sense, wit, and tact, every member of his numerous family, however young, ended, as he jestingly told his Sovereign, in attaching himself like a silkworm to the leaves of the Pay-List. Thus, by the King's intervention, his eldest son found a high and fixed position as a lawyer. The second, before the restoration a mere captain, was appointed to the command of a legion on the return from Ghent; then, thanks to the confusion of 1815, when the regulations were evaded, he passed into the bodyguard, returned to a line regiment, and found himself after the affair of the Trocadéro a lieutenant-general with a commission in the Guards. The youngest, appointed sous-préfet, ere long became a legal official and director of a municipal board of the city of Paris, where he was safe from changes in the Legislature. These bounties, bestowed without parade, and as secret as the favour enjoyed by the Count, fell unperceived. Though the father and his three sons each had sinecures enough to enjoy an income in salaries almost equal to that of a chief of department, their political good fortune excited no envy. In those early days of the constitutional system, few persons had very precise ideas of the peaceful domain of the civil service, where astute favourites managed to find an equivalent for the demolished abbeys. Monsieur le Comte de Fontaine, who till lately boasted that he had not read the Charter, and displayed such indignation at the greed of courtiers, had, before long, proved to his august master that he understood, as well as the King himself, the spirit and resources of the representative system. At the same time, notwithstanding the established careers open to his three sons, and the pecuniary advantages derived from four official appointments,

Monsieur de Fontaine was the head of too large a family to be able to re-establish his fortune easily and rapidly.

His three sons were rich in prospects, in favour, and in talent; but he had three daughters, and was afraid of wearying the monarch's benevolence. It occurred to him to mention only one by one, these virgins eager to light their torches. The King had too much good taste to leave his work incomplete. The marriage of the eldest with a Receiver-General, Planat de Baudry, was arranged by one of those royal speeches which cost nothing and are worth millions. One evening, when the Sovereign was out of spirits, he smiled on hearing of the existence of another Demoiselle de Fontaine, for whom he found a husband in the person of a young magistrate, of inferior birth, no doubt, but wealthy, and whom he created Baron. When, the year after, the Vendéen spoke of Mademoiselle Emilie de Fontaine, the King replied in his thin, sharp tones, '*Amicus Plato sed magis amica Natio.*' Then, a few days later, he treated his 'friend Fontaine' to a quatrain, harmless enough, which he styled an epigram, in which he made fun of these three daughters so skilfully introduced, under the form of a trinity. Nay, if report is to be believed, the monarch had found the point of the jest in the Unity of the three Divine Persons.

'If your Majesty would only condescend to turn the epigram into an epithalamium?' said the Comte, trying to turn the sally to good acount.

'Though I see the rhyme of it, I fail to see the reason,' retorted the King, who did not relish any pleasantry, however mild, on the subject of his poetry.

From that day his intercourse with Monsieur de Fontaine showed less amenity. Kings enjoy contradicting more than people think. Like most youngest children, Emilie de Fontaine was a Benjamin spoilt by almost everybody. The King's coolness, therefore, caused the Count all the more regret, because no marriage was ever so difficult to arrange as that of this darling daughter. To understand

all the obstacles we must make our way into the fine residence where the official was housed at the expense of the nation. Emilie had spent her childhood on the family estate, enjoying the abundance which suffices for the joys of early youth; her lightest wishes had been law to her sisters, her brothers, her mother, and even her father. All her relations doted on her. Having come to years of discretion just when her family was loaded with the favours of fortune, the enchantment of life continued. The luxury of Paris seemed to her just as natural as a wealth of flowers or fruit, or as the rural plenty which had been the joy of her first years. Just as in her childhood she had never been thwarted in the satisfaction of her playful desires, so now, at fourteen, she was still obeyed when she rushed into the whirl of fashion.

Thus, accustomed by degrees to the enjoyment of money, elegance of dress, of gilded drawing-rooms and fine carriages, became as necessary to her as the compliments of flattery, sincere or false, and the festivities and vanities of court life. Like most spoilt children, she tyrannised over those who loved her, and kept her blandishments for those who were indifferent. Her faults grew with her growth, and her parents were to gather the bitter fruits of this disastrous education. At the age of nineteen Emilie de Fontaine had not yet been pleased to make a choice from among the many young men whom her father's politics brought to his entertainments. Though so young, she asserted in society all the freedom of mind that a married woman can enjoy. Her beauty was so remarkable that, for her, to appear in a room was to be its queen; but, like sovereigns, she had no friends, though she was everywhere the object of attentions to which a finer nature than hers might perhaps have succumbed. Not a man, not even an old man, had it in him to contradict the opinions of a young girl whose lightest look could rekindle love in the coldest heart.

She had been educated with a care which her sisters had not enjoyed; painted pretty well, spoke Italian and English, and played the piano brilliantly; her voice, trained by the best masters, had a ring in it which made her singing irresistibly charming. Clever, and intimate with every branch of literature, she might have made folks believe that, as Mascarille says, people of quality come into the world knowing everything. She could argue fluently on Italian or Flemish painting, on the Middle Ages or the Renaissance; pronounced at haphazard on books new or old, and could expose the defects of a work with a cruelly graceful wit. The simplest thing she said was accepted by an admiring crowd as a *fetfah* of the Sultan by the Turks. She thus dazzled shallow persons; as to deeper minds, her natural tact enabled her to discern them, and for them she put forth so much fascination that, under cover of her charms, she escaped their scrutiny. This enchanting veneer covered a careless heart; the opinion—common to many young girls—that no one else dwelt in a sphere so lofty as to be able to understand the merits of her soul; and a pride based no less on her birth than on her beauty. In the absence of the overwhelming sentiment which, sooner or later, works havoc in a woman's heart, she spent her young ardour in an immoderate love of distinctions, and expressed the deepest contempt for persons of inferior birth. Supremely impertinent to all newly-created nobility, she made every effort to get her parents recognised as equals by the most illustrious families of the Saint-Germain quarter.

These sentiments had not escaped the observing eye of Monsieur de Fontaine, who more than once, when his two elder girls were married, had smarted under Emilie's sarcasm. Logical readers will be surprised to see the old Royalist bestowing his eldest daughter on a Receiver-General, possessed, indeed, of some old hereditary estates, but whose name was not preceded by the little word *to*

which the throne owed so many partisans, and his second to a magistrate too lately Baronified to obscure the fact that his father had sold firewood. This noteworthy change in the ideas of a noble on the verge of his sixtieth year—an age when men rarely renounce their convictions—was due not merely to his unfortunate residence in the modern Babylon, where, sooner or later, country folks all get their corners rubbed down; the Comte de Fontaine's new political conscience was also a result of the King's advice and friendship. The philosophical prince had taken pleasure in converting the Vendéen to the ideas required by the advance of the nineteenth century, and the new aspect of the Monarchy. Louis XVIII. aimed at fusing parties as Napoleon had fused things and men. The legitimate King, who was not less clever perhaps than his rival, acted in a contrary direction. The last head of the House of Bourbon was just as eager to satisfy the third estate and the creations of the Empire, by curbing the clergy, as the first of the Napoleons had been to attract the grand old nobility, or to endow the Church. The Privy Councillor, being in the secret of these royal projects, had insensibly become one of the most prudent and influential leaders of that moderate party which most desired a fusion of opinion in the interests of the nation. He preached the expensive doctrines of constitutional government, and lent all his weight to encourage the political see-saw which enabled his master to rule France in the midst of storms. Perhaps Monsieur de Fontaine hoped that one of the sudden gusts of legislation, whose unexpected efforts then startled the oldest politicians, might carry him up to the rank of peer. One of his most rigid principles was to recognise no nobility in France but that of the peerage—the only families that might enjoy any privileges.

'A nobility bereft of privileges,' he would say, 'is a tool without a handle.'

As far from Lafayette's party as he was from La

Bourdonnaye's, he ardently engaged in the task of general reconciliation, which was to result in a new era and splendid fortunes for France. He strove to convince the families who frequented his drawing-room, or those whom he visited, how few favourable openings would henceforth be offered by a civil or military career. He urged mothers to give their boys a start in independent and industrial professions, explaining that military posts and high Government appointments must at last pertain, in a quite constitutional order, to the younger sons of members of the peerage. According to him, the people had conquered a sufficiently large share in practical government by its elective assembly, its appointments to law-offices, and those of the exchequer, which, said he, would always, as heretofore, be the natural right of the distinguished men of the third estate.

These new notions of the head of the Fontaines, and the prudent matches for his eldest girls to which they had led, met with strong resistance in the bosom of his family. The Comtesse de Fontaine remained faithful to the ancient beliefs which no woman could disown, who, through her mother, belonged to the Rohans. Although she had for a while opposed the happiness and fortune awaiting her two eldest girls, she yielded to those private considerations which husband and wife confide to each other when their heads are resting on the same pillow. Monsieur de Fontaine calmly pointed out to his wife, by exact arithmetic, that their residence in Paris, the necessity for entertaining, the magnificence of the house which made up to them now for the privations so bravely shared in La Vendée, and the expenses of their sons, swallowed up the chief part of their income from salaries. They must therefore seize, as a boon from heaven, the opportunities which offered for settling their girls with such wealth. Would they not some day enjoy sixty—eighty—a hundred thousand francs a year? Such advantageous matches were not to be met with every day for girls

without a portion. Again, it was time that they should begin to think of economising, to add to the estate of Fontaine, and re-establish the old territorial fortune of the family. The Comtesse yielded to such cogent arguments, as every mother would have done in her place, though perhaps with a better grace; but she declared that Emilie, at any rate, should marry in such a way as to satisfy the pride she had unfortunately contributed to foster in the girl's young soul.

Thus events, which ought to have brought joy into the family, had introduced a small leaven of discord. The Receiver-General and the young lawyer were the objects of a ceremonious formality which the Comtesse and Emilie contrived to create. This etiquette soon found even ampler opportunity for the display of domestic tyranny; for Lieutenant-General de Fontaine married Mademoiselle Mongenod, the daughter of a rich banker; the Président very sensibly found a wife in a young lady whose father, twice or thrice a millionaire, had traded in salt; and the third brother, faithful to his plebeian doctrines, married Mademoiselle Grossetête, the only daughter of the Receiver-General at Bourges. The three sisters-in-law and the two brothers-in-law found the high sphere of political bigwigs, and the drawing-rooms of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, so full of charm and of personal advantages, that they united in forming a little court round the overbearing Emilie. This treaty between interest and pride was not, however, so firmly cemented but that the young despot was, not unfrequently, the cause of revolts in her little realm. Scenes, which the highest circles would not have disowned, kept up a sarcastic temper among all the members of this powerful family; and this, without seriously diminishing the regard they professed in public, degenerated sometimes in private into sentiments far from charitable. Thus the Lieutenant-General's wife, having become a Baronne, thought herself quite as noble as a Kergarouët, and imagined that her good hundred

thousand francs a year gave her the right to be as impertinent as her sister-in-law Emilie, whom she would sometimes wish to see happily married, as she announced that the daughter of some peer of France had married Monsieur So-and-so with no title to his name. The Vicomtesse de Fontaine amused herself by eclipsing Emilie in the taste and magnificence that were conspicuous in her dress, her furniture, and her carriages. The satirical spirit in which her brothers and sisters sometimes received the claims avowed by Mademoiselle de Fontaine roused her to wrath that a perfect hailstorm of sharp sayings could hardly mitigate. So when the head of the family felt a slight chill in the King's tacit and precarious friendship, he trembled all the more because, as a result of her sisters' defiant mockery, his favourite daughter had never looked so high.

In the midst of these circumstances, and at a moment when this petty domestic warfare had become serious, the monarch, whose favour Monsieur de Fontaine still hoped to regain, was attacked by the malady of which he was to die. The great political chief, who knew so well how to steer his bark in the midst of tempests, soon succumbed. Certain then of favours to come, the Comte de Fontaine made every effort to collect the élite of marrying men about his youngest daughter. Those who may have tried to solve the difficult problem of settling a haughty and capricious girl, will understand the trouble taken by the unlucky father. Such an affair, carried out to the liking of his beloved child, would worthily crown the career the Count had followed for these ten years at Paris. From the way in which his family claimed salaries under every department, it might be compared with the House of Austria, which, by intermarriage, threatens to pervade Europe. The old Vendéen was not to be discouraged in bringing forward suitors, so much had he his daughter's happiness at heart, but nothing could be more absurd than the way in which the impertinent young thing pronounced her verdicts and

judged the merits of her adorers. It might have been supposed that, like a princess in the *Arabian Nights*, Emilie was rich enough and beautiful enough to choose from among all the princes in the world. Her objections were each more preposterous than the last: one had too thick knees and was bow-legged, another was short-sighted, this one's name was Durand, that one limped, and almost all were too fat. Livelier, more attractive, and gayer than ever after dismissing two or three suitors, she rushed into the festivities of the winter season, and to balls, where her keen eyes criticised the celebrities of the day, delighting in encouraging proposals which she invariably rejected.

Nature had bestowed on her all the advantages needed for playing the part of Célimène. Tall and slight, Emilie de Fontaine could assume a dignified or a frolicsome mien at her will. Her neck was rather long, allowing her to affect beautiful attitudes of scorn and impertinence. She had cultivated a large variety of those turns of the head and feminine gestures, which emphasise so cruelly or so happily a hint or a smile. Fine black hair, thick and strongly-arched eyebrows, lent her countenance an expression of pride, to which her coquettish instincts and her mirror had taught her to add terror by a stare, or gentleness by the softness of her gaze, by the set or the gracious curve of her lips, by the coldness or the sweetness of her smile. When Emilie meant to conquer a heart, her pure voice did not lack melody; but she could also give it a sort of curt clearness when she was minded to paralyse a partner's indiscreet tongue. Her colourless face and alabaster brow were like the limpid surface of a lake, which by turns is rippled by the impulse of a breeze and recovers its glad serenity when the air is still. More than one young man, a victim to her scorn, accused her of acting a part; but she justified herself by inspiring her detractors with the desire to please her, and then subjecting them to all her most contemptuous caprice. Among the

young girls of fashion, not one knew better than she how to assume an air of reserve when a man of talent was introduced to her, or how to display the insulting politeness which treats an equal as an inferior, and to pour out her impertinence on all who tried to hold their heads on a level with hers. Wherever she went she seemed to be accepting homage rather than compliments, and even in a princess her airs and manner would have transformed the chair on which she sat into an imperial throne.

Monsieur de Fontaine discovered too late how utterly the education of the daughter he loved had been ruined by the tender devotion of the whole family. The admiration which the world is at first ready to bestow on a young girl, but for which, sooner or later, it takes its revenge, had added to Emilie's pride, and increased her self-confidence. Universal subservience had developed in her the selfishness natural to spoilt children, who, like kings, make a plaything of everything that comes to hand. As yet the graces of youth and the charms of talent hid these faults from every eye; faults all the more odious in a woman, since she can only please by self-sacrifice and unselfishness; but nothing escapes the eye of a good father, and Monsieur de Fontaine often tried to explain to his daughter the more important pages of the mysterious book of life. Vain effort! He had to lament his daughter's capricious indocility and ironical shrewdness too often to persevere in a task so difficult as that of correcting an ill-disposed nature. He contented himself with giving her from time to time some gentle and kind advice; but he had the sorrow of seeing his tenderest words slide from his daughter's heart as if it were of marble. A father's eyes are slow to be unsealed, and it needed more than one experience before the old Royalist perceived that his daughter's rare caresses were bestowed on him with an air of condescension. She was like young children, who seem to say to their mother, 'Make haste to kiss me, that I may go to play.' In short, Emilie

vouchsafed to be fond of her parents. But often, by those sudden whims, which seem inexplicable in young girls, she kept aloof and scarcely ever appeared; she complained of having to share her father's and mother's heart with too many people; she was jealous of every one, even of her brothers and sisters. Then, after creating a desert about her, the strange girl accused all nature of her unreal solitude and her wilful griefs. Strong in the experience of her twenty years, she blamed fate, because, not knowing that the mainspring of happiness is in ourselves, she demanded it of the circumstances of life. She would have fled to the ends of the earth to escape a marriage such as those of her two sisters, and nevertheless her heart was full of horrible jealousy at seeing them married, rich, and happy. In short, she sometimes led her mother—who was as much a victim to her vagaries as Monsieur de Fontaine—to suspect that she had a touch of madness.

But such aberrations are quite explicable; nothing is commoner than this unconfessed pride developed in the heart of young girls belonging to families high in the social scale, and gifted by nature with great beauty. They are almost all convinced that their mothers, now forty or fifty years of age, can neither sympathise with their young souls, nor conceive of their imaginings. They fancy that most mothers, jealous of their girls, want to dress them in their own way with the premeditated purpose of eclipsing them or robbing them of admiration. Hence, often, secret tears and dumb revolt against supposed tyranny. In the midst of these woes, which become very real though built on an imaginary basis, they have also a mania for composing a scheme of life, while casting for themselves a brilliant horoscope; their magic consists in taking their dreams for reality; secretly, in their long meditations, they resolve to give their heart and hand to none but a man possessing this or the other qualification; and they paint in fancy a model to which, whether or no,

the future lover must correspond. After some little experience of life, and the serious reflections that come with years, by dint of seeing the world and its prosaic round, by dint of observing unhappy examples, the brilliant hues of their ideal are extinguished. Then, one fine day, in the course of events, they are quite astonished to find themselves happy without the nuptial poetry of their day-dreams. It was on the strength of that poetry that Mademoiselle Emilie de Fontaine, in her slender wisdom, had drawn up a programme to which a suitor must conform to be accepted. Hence her disdain and sarcasm.

'Though young and of an ancient family, he must be a peer of France,' said she to herself. 'I could not bear not to see my coat-of-arms on the panels of my carriage among the folds of azure mantling, not to drive like the princes down the broad walk of the Champs Elysées on the days of Longchamps in Holy Week. Besides, my father says that it will some day be the highest dignity in France. He must be a soldier—but I reserve the right of making him retire; and he must bear an Order, that the sentries may present arms to us.'

And these rare qualifications would count for nothing if this creature of fancy had not a most amiable temper, a fine figure, intelligence, and, above all, if he were not slender. To be lean, a personal grace which is but fugitive, especially under a representative government, was an indispensable condition. Mademoiselle de Fontaine had an ideal standard which was to be the model. A young man who at the first glance did not fulfil the requisite conditions did not even get a second look.

'Good Heavens! see how fat he is!' was with her the utmost expression of contempt.

To hear her, people of respectable corpulence were incapable of sentiment, bad husbands, and unfit for civilised society. Though it is esteemed a beauty in the

East, to be fat seemed to her a misfortune for a woman; but in a man it was a crime. These paradoxical views were amusing, thanks to a certain liveliness of rhetoric. The Count felt nevertheless that by-and-by his daughter's affectations, of which the absurdity would be evident to some women who were not less clear-sighted than merciless, would inevitably become a subject of constant ridicule. He feared lest her eccentric notions should deviate into bad style. He trembled to think that the pitiless world might already be laughing at a young woman who remained so long on the stage without arriving at any conclusion of the drama she was playing. More than one actor in it, disgusted by a refusal, seemed to be waiting for the slightest turn of ill-luck to take his revenge. The indifferent, the lookers-on were beginning to weary of it; admiration is always exhausting to human beings. The old Vendéen knew better than any one that if there is an art in choosing the right moment for coming forward on the boards of the world, on those of the Court, in a drawing-room or on the stage, it is still more difficult to quit them in the nick of time. So during the first winter after the accession of Charles x., he redoubled his efforts, seconded by his three sons and his sons-in-law, to assemble in the rooms of his official residence the best matches which Paris and the various deputations from departments could offer. The splendour of his entertainments, the luxury of his dining-room, and his dinners, fragrant with truffles, rivalled the famous banquets by which the ministers of that time secured the vote of their parliamentary recruits.

The Honourable Deputy was consequently pointed at as a most influential corrupter of the legislative honesty of the illustrious Chamber that was dying as it would seem of indigestion. A whimsical result! his efforts to get his daughter married secured him a splendid popularity. He perhaps found some covert advantage in selling his truffles twice over. This accusation, started by certain

mocking Liberals, who made up by their flow of words for their small following in the Chamber, was not a success. The Poitevin gentleman had always been so noble and so honourable, that he was not once the object of those epigrams which the malicious journalism of the day hurled at the three hundred votes of the centre, at the Ministers, the cooks, the Directors-General, the princely Amphitryons, and the official supporters of the Villèle Ministry.

At the close of this campaign, during which Monsieur de Fontaine had on several occasions brought out all his forces, he believed that this time the procession of suitors would not be a mere dissolving view in his daughter's eyes; that it was time she should make up her mind. He felt a certain inward satisfaction at having well fulfilled his duty as a father. And having left no stone unturned, he hoped that, among so many hearts laid at Emilie's feet, there might be one to which her caprice might give a preference. Incapable of repeating such an effort, and tired, too, of his daughter's conduct, one morning, towards the end of Lent, when the business at the Chamber did not demand his vote, he determined to ask what her views were. While his valet was artistically decorating his bald yellow head with the delta of powder which, with the hanging '*ailes de pigeon*,' completed his venerable style of hairdressing, Emilie's father, not without some secret misgivings, told his old servant to go and desire the haughty damsel to appear in the presence of the head of the family.

'Joseph,' he added, when his hair was dressed, 'take away that towel, draw back the curtains, put those chairs square, shake the rug, and lay it quite straight. Dust everything.—Now, air the room a little by opening the window.'

The Count multiplied his orders, putting Joseph out of breath, and the old servant, understanding his master's intentions, aired and tidied the room, of course the least cared for of any in the house, and succeeded in giving a

look of harmony to the files of bills, the letter-boxes, the books and furniture of this sanctum, where the interests of the royal demesnes were debated over. When Joseph had reduced this chaos to some sort of order, and brought to the front such things as might be most pleasing to the eye, as if it were a shop front, or such as by their colour might give the effect of a kind of official poetry, he stood for a minute in the midst of the labyrinth of papers piled in some places even on the floor, admired his handiwork, jerked his head, and went.

The anxious sinecure-holder did not share his retainer's favourable opinion. Before seating himself in his deep chair, whose rounded back screened him from draughts, he looked round him doubtfully, examined his dressing-gown with a hostile expression, shook off a few grains of snuff, carefully wiped his nose, arranged the tongs and shovel, made the fire, pulled up the heels of his slippers, pulled out his little queue of hair which had lodged horizontally between the collar of his waistcoat and that of his dressing-gown, restoring it to its perpendicular position; then he swept up the ashes of the hearth, which bore witness to a persistent catarrh. Finally, the old man did not settle himself till he had once more looked all over the room, hoping that nothing could give occasion to the saucy and impertinent remarks with which his daughter was apt to answer his good advice. On this occasion he was anxious not to compromise his dignity as a father. He daintily took a pinch of snuff, cleared his throat two or three times, as if he were about to demand a count out of the House; then he heard his daughter's light step, and she came in humming an air from *Il Barbiere*.

'Good-morning, papa. What do you want with me so early?' Having sung these words, as though they were the refrain of the melody, she kissed the Count, not with the familiar tenderness which makes a daughter's love so sweet a thing, but with the light carelessness of a mistress confident of pleasing, whatever she may do.

'My dear child,' said Monsieur de Fontaine, gravely, 'I sent for you to talk to you very seriously about your future prospects. You are at this moment under the necessity of making such a choice of a husband as may secure you durable happiness——'

'My good father,' replied Emilie, assuming her most coaxing tone of voice to interrupt him, 'it strikes me that the armistice on which we agreed as to my suitors is not yet expired.'

'Emilie, we must to-day forbear from jesting on so important a matter. For some time past the efforts of those who most truly love you, my dear child, have been concentrated on the endeavour to settle you suitably; and you would be guilty of ingratitude in meeting with levity those proofs of kindness which I am not alone in lavishing on you.'

As she heard these words, after flashing a mischievously inquisitive look at the furniture of her father's study, the young girl brought forward the armchair which looked as if it had been least used by petitioners, set it at the side of the fireplace so as to sit facing her father, and settled herself in so solemn an attitude that it was impossible not to read in it a mocking intention, crossing her arms over the dainty trimmings of a pelerine *à la neige*, and ruthlessly crushing its endless frills of white tulle. After a laughing side glance at her old father's troubled face, she broke silence.

'I never heard you say, my dear father, that the Government issued its instructions in its dressing-gown. However,' and she smiled, 'that does not matter; the mob are probably not particular. Now, what are your proposals for legislation, and your official introductions?'

'I shall not always be able to make them, headstrong girl!—Listen, Emilie. It is my intention no longer to compromise my reputation, which is part of my children's fortune, by recruiting the regiment of dancers which, spring after spring, you put to rout. You have already

been the cause of many dangerous misunderstandings with certain families. I hope to make you perceive more truly the difficulties of your position and of ours. You are two-and-twenty, my dear child, and you ought to have been married nearly three years since. Your brothers and your two sisters are richly and happily provided for. But, my dear, the expenses occasioned by these marriages, and the style of housekeeping you require of your mother, have made such inroads on our income that I can hardly promise you a hundred thousand francs as a marriage portion. From this day forth I shall think only of providing for your mother, who must not be sacrificed to her children. Emilie, if I were to be taken from my family, Madame de Fontaine could not be left at anybody's mercy, and ought to enjoy the affluence which I have given her too late as the reward of her devotion in my misfortunes. You see, my child, that the amount of your fortune bears no relation to your notions of grandeur. Even that would be such a sacrifice as I have not hitherto made for either of my children; but they have generously agreed not to expect in the future any compensation for the advantage thus given to a too favoured child.'

'In their position!' said Emilie, with an ironical toss of her head.

'My dear, do not so depreciate those who love you. Only the poor are generous as a rule; the rich have always excellent reasons for not handing over twenty thousand francs to a relation. Come, my child, do not pout, let us talk rationally.—Among the young marrying men have you noticed Monsieur de Manerville?'

'Oh, he minces his words—he says Zules instead of Jules; he is always looking at his feet, because he thinks them small, and he gazes at himself in the glass! Besides, he is fair. I don't like fair men.'

'Well, then, Monsieur de Beaudenord?'

'He is not noble! he is ill made and stout. He is dark, it is true.—If the two gentlemen could agree to combine

their fortunes, and the first would give his name and his figure to the second, who should keep his dark hair, then —perhaps——'

'What can you say against Monsieur de Rastignac?'

'Madame de Nucingen has made a banker of him,' she said with meaning.

'And our cousin, the Vicomte de Portenduère?'

'A mere boy, who dances badly; besides, he has no fortune. And, after all, papa, none of these people have titles. I want, at least, to be a countess like my mother.'

'Have you seen no one, then, this winter——?'

'No, papa.'

'What then do you want?'

'The son of a peer of France.'

'My dear girl, you are mad!' said Monsieur de Fontaine, rising.

But he suddenly lifted his eyes to heaven, and seemed to find a fresh fount of resignation in some religious thought; then, with a look of fatherly pity at his daughter, who herself was moved, he took her hand, pressed it, and said with deep feeling: 'God is my witness, poor mistaken child, I have conscientiously discharged my duty to you as a father--conscientiously, do I say? Most lovingly, my Emilie. Yes, God knows! This winter I have brought before you more than one good man, whose character, whose habits, and whose temper were known to me, and all seemed worthy of you. My child, my task is done. From this day forth you are the arbiter of your fate, and I consider myself both happy and unhappy at finding myself relieved of the heaviest of paternal functions. I know not whether you will for any long time, now, hear a voice which, to you, has never been stern; but remember that conjugal happiness does not rest so much on brilliant qualities and ample fortune as on reciprocal esteem. This happiness is, in its nature, modest, and devoid of show. So now, my dear, my consent is given before-

hand, whoever the son-in-law may be whom you introduce to me; but if you should be unhappy, remember you will have no right to accuse your father. I shall not refuse to take proper steps and help you, only your choice must be serious and final. I will never twice compromise the respect due to my white hairs.'

The affection thus expressed by her father, the solemn tones of his urgent address, deeply touched Mademoiselle de Fontaine; but she concealed her emotion, seated herself on her father's knees—for he had dropped all tremulous into his chair again—caressed him fondly, and coaxed him so engagingly that the old man's brow cleared. As soon as Emilie thought that her father had got over his painful agitation, she said in a gentle voice: 'I have to thank you for your graceful attention, my dear father. You have had your room set in order to receive your beloved daughter. You did not perhaps know that you would find her so foolish and so headstrong. But, papa, is it so difficult to get married to a peer of France? You declared that they were manufactured by dozens. At least, you will not refuse to advise me.'

'No, my poor child, no;—and more than once I may have occasion to cry, "Beware!" Remember that the making of peers is so recent a force in our government machinery that they have no great fortunes. Those who are rich look to becoming richer. The wealthiest member of our peerage has not half the income of the least rich lord in the English Upper Chamber. Thus all the French peers are on the look-out for great heiresses for their sons, wherever they may meet with them. The necessity in which they find themselves of marrying for money will certainly exist for at least two centuries.

'Pending such a fortunate accident as you long for—and this fastidiousness may cost you the best years of your life—your attractions might work a miracle, for men often marry for love in these days. When experience lurks behind so sweet a face as yours it may achieve

wonders. In the first place, have you not the gift of recognising virtue in the greater or small dimensions of a man's body? This is no small matter! To so wise a young person as you are, I need not enlarge on all the difficulties of the enterprise. I am sure that you would never attribute good sense to a stranger because he had a handsome face, or all the virtues because he had a fine figure. And I am quite of your mind in thinking that the sons of peers ought to have an air peculiar to themselves, and perfectly distinctive manners. Though nowadays no external sign stamps a man of rank, those young men will have, perhaps, to you the indefinable something that will reveal it. Then, again, you have your heart well in hand, like a good horseman who is sure his steed cannot bolt. Luck be with you, my dear!'

'You are making game of me, papa. Well, I assure you that I would rather die in Mademoiselle de Condé's convent than not be the wife of a peer of France.'

She slipped out of her father's arms, and, proud of being her own mistress, went off singing the air of *Cara non dubitare*, in the 'Matrimonio Segreto.'

As it happened, the family were that day keeping the anniversary of a family fête. At dessert, Madame Planat, the Receiver-General's wife, spoke with some enthusiasm of a young American owning an immense fortune, who had fallen passionately in love with her sister, and made through her the most splendid proposals.

'A banker, I rather think,' observed Emilie carelessly. 'I do not like money dealers.'

'But, Emilie,' replied the Baron de Villaine, the husband of the Count's second daughter, 'you do not like lawyers either; so that if you refuse men of wealth who have not titles, I do not quite see in what class you are to choose a husband.'

'Especially, Emilie, with your standard of slimness,' added the Lieutenant-General.

'I know what I want,' replied the young lady.

'My sister wants a fine name, a fine young man, fine prospects, and a hundred thousand francs a year,' said the Baronne de Fontaine. 'Monsieur de Marsay, for instance.'

'I know, my dear,' retorted Emilie, 'that I do not mean to make such a foolish marriage as some I have seen. Moreover, to put an end to these matrimonial discussions, I hereby declare that I shall look on any one who talks to me of marriage as a foe to my peace of mind.'

An uncle of Emilie's, a vice-admiral, whose fortune had just been increased by twenty thousand francs a year in consequence of the Act of Indemnity, and a man of seventy, feeling himself privileged to say hard things to his grand-niece, on whom he doted, in order to mollify the bitter tone of the discussion now exclaimed—

'Do not tease my poor little Emilie; don't you see she is waiting till the Duc de Bordeaux comes of age!'

The old man's pleasantry was received with general laughter.

'Take care I don't marry you, old fool!' replied the young girl, whose last words were happily drowned in the noise.

'My dear children,' said Madame de Fontaine, to soften this saucy retort, 'Emilie, like you, will take no advice but her mother's.'

'Bless me! I shall take no advice but my own in a matter which concerns no one but myself,' said Mademoiselle de Fontaine very distinctly.

At this all eyes were turned to the head of the family. Every one seemed anxious as to what he would do to assert his dignity. The venerable gentleman enjoyed much consideration, not only in the world; happier than many fathers, he was also appreciated by his family, all its members having a just esteem for the solid qualities by which he had been able to make their fortunes. Hence he was treated with the deep respect

which is shown by English families, and some aristocratic houses on the continent, to the living representative of an ancient pedigree. Deep silence had fallen; and the guests looked alternately from the spoilt girl's proud and sulky pout to the severe faces of Monsieur and Madame de Fontaine.

'I have made my daughter Emilie mistress of her own fate,' was the reply spoken by the Count in a deep voice.

Relations and guests gazed at Mademoiselle de Fontaine with mingled curiosity and pity. The words seemed to declare that fatherly affection was weary of the contest with a character that the whole family knew to be incorrigible. The sons-in-law muttered, and the brothers glanced at their wives with mocking smiles. From that moment every one ceased to take any interest in the haughty girl's prospects of marriage. Her old uncle was the only person who, as an old sailor, ventured to stand on her tack, and take her broadsides, without ever troubling himself to return her fire.

When the fine weather was settled, and after the budget was voted, the whole family—a perfect example of the parliamentary families on the northern side of the Channel who have a footing in every government department, and ten votes in the House of Commons—flew away like a brood of young birds to the charming neighbourhoods of Aulnay, Antony, and Châtenay. The wealthy Receiver-General had lately purchased in this part of the world a country-house for his wife, who remained in Paris only during the session. Though the fair Emilie despised the commonalty, her feeling was not carried so far as to scorn the advantages of a fortune acquired in a profession; so she accompanied her sister to the sumptuous villa, less out of affection for the members of her family who were visiting there, than because fashion has ordained that every woman who has any self-respect must leave Paris in the summer. The green seclusion of Sceaux answered to perfection the

requirements of good style and of the duties of an official position.

As it is extremely doubtful that the fame of the 'Bal de Sceaux' should ever have extended beyond the borders of the Department of the Seine, it will be necessary to give some account of this weekly festivity, which at that time was important enough to threaten to become an institution. The environs of the little town of Sceaux enjoy a reputation due to the scenery, which is considered enchanting. Perhaps it is quite ordinary, and owes its fame only to the stupidity of the Paris townsfolk, who, emerging from the stony abyss in which they are buried, would find something to admire in the flats of La Beauce. However, as the poetic shades of Aulnay, the hillsides of Antony, and the valley of the Bièvre are peopled with artists who have travelled far, by foreigners who are very hard to please, and by a great many pretty women not devoid of taste, it is to be supposed that the Parisians are right. But Sceaux possesses another attraction not less powerful to the Parisian. In the midst of a garden whence there are delightful views, stands a large rotunda open on all sides, with a light, spreading roof supported on elegant pillars. This rural baldachino shelters a dancing-floor. The most stuck-up landowners of the neighbourhood rarely fail to make an excursion thither once or twice during the season, arriving at this rustic palace of Terpsichore either in dashing parties on horseback, or in the light and elegant carriages which powder the philosophical pedestrian with dust. The hope of meeting some women of fashion, and of being seen by them—and the hope, less often disappointed, of seeing young peasant girls, as wily as judges—crowds the ballroom at Sceaux with numerous swarms of lawyers' clerks, of the disciples of Æsculapius, and other youths whose complexions are kept pale and moist by the damp atmosphere of Paris back-shops. And a good many bourgeois marriages have had their beginning to the sound of

the band occupying the centre of this circular ballroom. If that roof could speak, what love-stories could it not tell!

This interesting medley gave the Sceaux balls at that time a spice of more amusement than those of two or three places of the same kind near Paris; and it had incontestable advantages in its rotunda, and the beauty of its situation and its gardens. Emilie was the first to express a wish to play at being *common folk* at this gleeful suburban entertainment, and promised herself immense pleasure in mingling with the crowd. Everybody wondered at her desire to wander through such a mob; but is there not a keen pleasure to grand people in an *incognito*? Mademoiselle de Fontaine amused herself with imagining all these town-bred figures; she fancied herself leaving the memory of a bewitching glance and smile stamped on more than one shopkeeper heart, laughed beforehand at the damsels' airs, and sharpened her pencils for the scenes she proposed to sketch in her satirical album. Sunday could not come soon enough to satisfy her impatience.

The party from the Villa Planat set out on foot, so as not to betray the rank of the personages who were about to honour the ball with their presence. They dined early. And the month of May humoured this aristocratic escapade by one of its finest evenings. Mademoiselle de Fontaine was quite surprised to find in the rotunda some quadrilles made up of persons who seemed to belong to the upper classes. Here and there, indeed, were some young men who look as though they must have saved for a month to shine for a day; and she perceived several couples whose too hearty glee suggested nothing conjugal; still, she could only glean instead of gathering a harvest. She was amazed to see that pleasure in a cotton dress was so very like pleasure robed in satin, and that the girls of the middle class danced quite as well as ladies—nay, sometimes better. Most of the women were simply and suitably dressed. Those who in this assembly represented the

ruling power, that is to say, the country-folk, kept apart with wonderful politeness. In fact, Mademoiselle Emilie had to study the various elements that composed the mixture before she could find any subject for pleasantry. But she had not time to give herself up to malicious criticism, nor opportunity for hearing many of the startling speeches which caricaturists so gladly pick up. The haughty young lady suddenly found a flower in this wide field—the metaphor is reasonable—whose splendour and colouring worked on her imagination with all the fascination of novelty. It often happens that we look at a dress, a hanging, a blank sheet of paper, with so little heed that we do not at first detect a stain or a bright spot which afterwards strikes the eye as though it had come there at the very instant when we see it; and by a sort of moral phenomenon somewhat resembling this, Mademoiselle de Fontaine discovered in a young man the external perfections of which she had so long dreamed.

Seated on one of the clumsy chairs which marked the boundary line of the circular floor, she had placed herself at the end of the row formed by the family party, so as to be able to stand up or push forward as her fancy moved her, treating the living pictures and groups in the hall as if she were in a picture gallery; impertinently turning her eyeglass on persons not two yards away, and making her remarks as though she were criticising or praising a study of a head, a painting of *genre*. Her eyes, after wandering over the vast moving picture, were suddenly caught by this figure, which seemed to have been placed on purpose in one corner of the canvas, and in the best light, like a person out of all proportion with the rest.

The stranger, alone and absorbed in thought, leaned lightly against one of the columns that supported the roof; his arms were folded, and he leaned slightly on one side as though he had placed himself there to have his portrait taken by a painter. His attitude, though full of elegance and dignity, was devoid of affectation. Nothing

suggested that he had half turned his head, and bent it a little to the right like Alexander, or Lord Byron, and some other great men, for the sole purpose of attracting attention. His fixed gaze followed a girl who was dancing, and betrayed some strong feeling. His slender, easy frame recalled the noble proportions of the Apollo. Fine black hair curled naturally over a high forehead. At a glance Mademoiselle de Fontaine observed that his linen was fine, his gloves fresh, and evidently bought of a good maker, and his feet small and well shod in boots of Irish kid. He had none of the vulgar trinkets displayed by the dandies of the National Guard or the Lovelaces of the counting-house. A black riband, to which an eyeglass was attached, hung over a waistcoat of the most fashionable cut. Never had the fastidious Emilie seen a man's eyes shaded by such long, curled lashes. Melancholy and passion were expressed in this face, and the complexion was of a manly olive hue. His mouth seemed ready to smile, unbending the corners of eloquent lips; but this, far from hinting at gaiety, revealed on the contrary a sort of pathetic grace. There was too much promise in that head, too much distinction in his whole person, to allow of one's saying, 'What a handsome man!' or 'What a fine man!' One wanted to know him. The most clear-sighted observer, on seeing this stranger, could not have helped taking him for a clever man attracted to this rural festivity by some powerful motive.

All these observations cost Emilie only a minute's attention, during which the privileged gentleman under her severe scrutiny became the object of her secret admiration. She did not say to herself, 'He must be a peer of France!' but, 'Oh, if only he is noble, and he surely must be——' Without finishing her thought, she suddenly rose, and followed by her brother the General, she made her way towards the column, affecting to watch the merry quadrilles; but by a stratagem of the eye, familiar to women, she lost not a gesture of the

young man as she went towards him. The stranger politely moved to make way for the new-comers, and went to lean against another pillar. Emilie, as much nettled by his politeness as she might have been by an impertinence, began talking to her brother in a louder voice than good taste enjoined; she turned and tossed her head, gesticulated eagerly, and laughed for no particular reason, less to amuse her brother than to attract the attention of the imperturbable stranger. None of her little arts succeeded. Mademoiselle de Fontaine then followed the direction in which his eyes were fixed, and discovered the cause of his indifference.

In the midst of the quadrille, close in front of them, a pale girl was dancing; her face was like one of the divinities which Girodet has introduced into his immense composition of French Warriors received by Ossian. Emilie fancied that she recognised her as a distinguished *mylady* who for some months had been living on a neighbouring estate. Her partner was a lad of about fifteen, with red hands, and dressed in nankeen trousers, a blue coat, and white shoes, which showed that the damsel's love of dancing made her easy to please in the matter of partners. Her movements did not betray her apparent delicacy, but a faint flush already tinged her white cheeks, and her complexion was gaining colour. Mademoiselle de Fontaine went nearer, to be able to examine the young lady at the moment when she returned to her place, while the side couples in their turn danced the figure. But the stranger went up to the pretty dancer, and leaning over, said in a gentle but commanding tone—

'Clara, my child, do not dance any more.'

Clara made a little pouting face, bent her head, and finally smiled. When the dance was over, the young man wrapped her in a cashmere shawl with a lover's care, and seated her in a place sheltered from the wind. Very soon Mademoiselle de Fontaine, seeing them rise and

walk round the place as if preparing to leave, found means to follow them under pretence of admiring the views from the garden. Her brother lent himself with malicious good-humour to the divagations of her rather eccentric wanderings. Emilie then saw the attractive couple get into an elegant Tilbury, by which stood a mounted groom in livery. At the moment when, from his high seat, the young man was drawing the reins even, she caught a glance from his eye such as a man casts aimlessly at the crowd; and then she enjoyed the feeble satisfaction of seeing him twice turn his head to look at her. The young lady did the same. Was it from jealousy?

'I imagine you have now seen enough of the garden,' said her brother. 'We may go back to the dancing.'

'I am ready,' said she. 'Do you think the girl can be a relation of Lady Dudley's.'

'Lady Dudley may have some male relation staying with her,' said the Baron de Fontaine; 'but a young girl!—No!'

Next day Mademoiselle de Fontaine expressed a wish to take a ride. Then she gradually accustomed her old uncle and her brothers to escorting her in very early rides, excellent, she declared, for her health. She had a particular fancy for the environs of the hamlet where Lady Dudley was living. Notwithstanding her cavalry manœuvres, she did not meet the stranger so soon as the eager search she pursued might have allowed her to hope. She went several times to the 'Bal de Sceaux' without seeing the young Englishman who had dropped from the skies to pervade and beautify her dreams. Though nothing spurs on a young girl's infant passion so effectually as an obstacle, there was a time when Mademoiselle de Fontaine was on the point of giving up her strange and secret search, almost despairing of the success of an enterprise whose singularity may give some idea of the boldness of her temper. In point of fact, she might have

wandered long about the village of Châtenay without meeting her Unknown. The fair Clara—since that was the name Emilie had overhead—was not English, and the stranger who escorted her did not dwell among the flowery and fragrant bowers of Châtenay.

One evening Emilie, out riding with her uncle, who, during the fine weather, had gained a fairly long truce from the gout, met Lady Dudley. The distinguished foreigner had with her in her open carriage Monsieur Vandenesse. Emilie recognised the handsome couple, and her suppositions were at once dissipated like a dream. Annoyed, as any woman must be whose expectations are frustrated, she touched up her horse so suddenly that her uncle had the greatest difficulty in following her, she had set off at such a pace.

'I am too old, it would seem, to understand these youthful spirits,' said the old sailor to himself as he put his horse to a canter; 'or perhaps young people are not what they used to be. But what ails my niece? Now she is walking at a foot-pace like a gendarme on patrol in the Paris streets. One might fancy she wanted to outflank that worthy man, who looks to me like an author dreaming over his poetry, for he has, I think, a notebook in his hand. My word, I am a great simpleton! Is not that the very young man we are in search of!'

At this idea the old admiral moderated his horse's pace so as to follow his niece without making any noise. He had played too many pranks in the years 1771 and soon after, a time of our history when gallantry was held in honour, not to guess at once that by the merest chance Emilie had met the Unknown of the Sceaux gardens. In spite of the film which age had drawn over his grey eyes, the Comte de Kergarouët could recognise the signs of extreme agitation in his niece, under the unmoved expression she tried to give to her features. The girl's piercing eyes were fixed in a sort of dull amaze-

ment on the stranger, who quietly walked on in front of her.

'Ay, that's it,' thought the sailor. 'She is following him as a pirate follows a merchantman. Then, when she has lost sight of him, she will be in despair at not knowing who it is she is in love with, and whether he is a marquis or a shopkeeper. Really these young heads need an old fogey like me always by their side . . .'

He unexpectedly spurred his horse in such a way as to make his niece's bolt, and rode so hastily between her and the young man on foot that he obliged him to fall back on to the grassy bank which rose from the roadside. Then, abruptly drawing up, the Count exclaimed—

'Couldn't you get out of the way?'

'I beg your pardon, Monsieur. But I did not know that it lay with me to apologise to you because you almost rode me down.'

'There, enough of that, my good fellow!' replied the sailor harshly, in a sneering tone that was nothing less than insulting. At the same time the Count raised his hunting-crop as if to strike his horse, and touched the young fellow's shoulder, saying, 'A liberal citizen is a reasoner; every reasoner should be prudent.'

The young man went up the bankside as he heard the sarcasm; then he crossed his arms, and said in an excited tone of voice, 'I cannot suppose, Monsieur, as I look at your white hairs, that you still amuse yourself by provoking duels——'

'White hairs!' cried the sailor, interrupting him. 'You lie in your throat. They are only grey.'

A quarrel thus begun had in a few seconds become so fierce that the younger man forgot the moderation he had tried to preserve. Just as the Comte de Kergarouet saw his niece coming back to them with every sign of the greatest uneasiness, he told his antagonist his name, bidding him keep silence before the young lady entrusted

to his care. The stranger could not help smiling as he gave a visiting card to the old man, desiring him to observe that he was living in a country-house at Chevreuse; and, after pointing this out to him, he hurried away.

'You very nearly damaged that poor young counter-jumper, my dear,' said the Count, advancing hastily to meet Emilie. 'Do you not know how to hold your horse in?—And there you leave me to compromise my dignity in order to screen your folly; whereas if you had but stopped, one of your looks, or one of your pretty speeches—one of those you can make so prettily when you are not pert—would have set everything right, even if you had broken his arm.'

'But, my dear uncle, it was your horse, not mine, that caused the accident. I really think you can no longer ride; you are not so good a horseman as you were last year.—But instead of talking nonsense——'

'Nonsense, by Gad! Is it nothing to be so impertinent to your uncle?'

'Ought we not to go on and inquire if the young man is hurt? He is limping, uncle, only look!'

'No, he is running; I rated him soundly.'

'Oh, yes, uncle; I know you there!'

'Stop,' said the Count, pulling Emilie's horse by the bridle, 'I do not see the necessity of making advances to some shopkeeper who is only too lucky to have been thrown down by a charming young lady, or the commander of *La Belle-Poule*.'

'Why do you think he is anything so common, my dear uncle? He seems to me to have very fine manners.'

'Every one has manners nowadays, my dear.'

'No, uncle, not every one has the air and style which come of the habit of frequenting drawing-rooms, and I am ready to lay a bet with you that the young man is of noble birth.'

'You had not long to study him.'

'No, but it is not the first time I have seen him.'

'Nor is it the first time you have looked for him,' replied the admiral with a laugh.

Emilie coloured. Her uncle amused himself for some time with her embarrassment; then he said: 'Emilie, you know that I love you as my own child, precisely because you are the only member of the family who has the legitimate pride of high birth. Devil take it, child, who could have believed that sound principles would become so rare? Well, I will be your confidant. My dear child, I see that this young gentleman is not indifferent to you. Hush! All the family would laugh at us if we sailed under the wrong flag. You know what that means. We two will keep our secret, and I promise to bring him straight into the drawing-room.'

'When, uncle?'

'To-morrow.'

'But, my dear uncle, I am not committed to anything?'

'Nothing whatever, and you may bombard him, set fire to him, and leave him to founder like an old hulk if you choose. He won't be the first, I fancy?'

'You *are* kind, uncle!'

As soon as the Count got home he put on his glasses, quietly took the card out of his pocket, and read, 'Maximilien Longueville, Rue du Sentier.'

'Make yourself happy, my dear niece,' he said to Emilie, 'you may hook him with an easy conscience; he belongs to one of our historical families, and if he is not a peer of France, he infallibly will be.'

'How do you know so much?'

'That is my secret.'

'Then do you know his name?'

The old man bowed his grey head, which was not unlike a gnarled oak-stump, with a few leaves fluttering about it, withered by autumnal frosts; and his niece immediately began to try the ever-new power of her coquettish arts. Long familiar with the secret of cajoling

the old man, she lavished on him the most childlike caresses, the tenderest names; she even went so far as to kiss him to induce him to divulge so important a secret. The old man, who spent his life in playing off these scenes on his niece, often paying for them with a present of jewellery, or by giving her his box at the opera, this time amused himself with her entreaties, and, above all, her caresses. But as he spun out this pleasure too long, Emilie grew angry, passed from coaxing to sarcasm and sulks; then, urged by curiosity, she recovered herself. The diplomatic admiral extracted a solemn promise from his niece that she would for the future be gentler, less noisy, and less wilful, that she would spend less, and, above all, tell him everything. The treaty being concluded, and signed by a kiss impressed on Emilie's white brow, he led her into a corner of the room, drew her on to his knee, held the card under his thumbs so as to hide it, and then uncovered the letters one by one, spelling the name of Longueville; but he firmly refused to show her anything more.

This incident added to the intensity of Mademoiselle de Fontaine's secret sentiment, and during chief part of the night she evolved the most brilliant pictures from the dreams with which she had fed her hopes. At last, thanks to chance, to which she had so often appealed, Emilie could now see something very unlike a chimera at the fountain-head of the imaginary wealth with which she gilded her married life. Ignorant, as all young girls are, of the perils of love and marriage, she was passionately captivated by the externals of marriage and love. Is not this as much as to say that her feeling had birth like all the feelings of extreme youth—sweet but cruel mistakes, which exert a fatal influence on the lives of young girls so inexperienced as to trust their own judgment to take care of their future happiness?

Next morning, before Emilie was awake, her uncle had hastened to Chevreuse. On recognising, in the court-

yard of an elegant little villa, the young man he had so determinedly insulted the day before, he went up to him with the pressing politeness of men of the old court.

'Why, my dear sir, who could have guessed that I should have a brush, at the age of seventy-three, with the son, or the grandson, of one of my best friends? I am a vice-admiral, Monsieur; is not that as much as to say that I think no more of fighting a duel that of smoking a cigar? Why, in my time, no two young men could be intimate till they had seen the colour of their blood! But 'sdeath, sir, last evening, sailor-like, I had taken a drop too much grog on board, and I ran you down. Shake hands; I would rather take a hundred rebuffs from a Longueville than cause his family the smallest regret.'

However coldly the young man tried to behave to he Comte de Kergarouët, he could not long resist the frank cordiality of his manner, and presently gave him his hand.

'You were going out riding,' said the Count. 'Do not let me detain you. But, unless you have other plans, I beg you will come to dinner to-day at the Villa Planat. My nephew, the Comte de Fontaine, is a man it is essential that you should know. Ah, ha! And I propose to make up to you for my clumsiness by introducing you to five of the prettiest women in Paris. So, so, young man, your brow is clearing! I am fond of young people, and I like to see them happy. Their happiness reminds me of the good times of my youth, when adventures were not lacking, any more than duels. We were gay dogs then! Nowadays you think and worry over everything, as though there had never been a fifteenth and a sixteenth century.'

'But, Monsieur, are we not in the right? The sixteenth century only gave religious liberty to Europe, and the nineteenth will give it political lib——'

'Oh, we will not talk politics. I am a perfect old woman—*ultra* you see. But I do not hinder young men

from being revolutionary, so long as they leave the King at liberty to disperse their assemblies.'

When they had gone a little way, and the Count and his companion were in the heart of the woods, the old sailor pointed out a slender young birch sapling, pulled up his horse, took out one of his pistols, and the bullet was lodged in the heart of the tree, fifteen paces away.

'You see, my dear fellow, that I am not afraid of a duel,' he said with comical gravity, as he looked at Monsieur Longueville.

'Nor am I,' replied the young man, promptly cocking his pistol; he aimed at the hole made by the Comte's bullet, and sent his own in close to it.

'That is what I call a well-educated man,' cried the admiral with enthusiasm.

During this ride with the youth, whom he already regarded as his nephew, he found endless opportunities of catechising him on all the trifles of which a perfect knowledge constituted, according to his private code, an accomplished gentleman.

'Have you any debts?' he at last asked of his companion, after many other inquiries.

'No, Monsieur.'

'What, you pay for all you have?'

'Punctually; otherwise we should lose our credit, and every sort of respect.'

'But at least you have more than one mistress? Ah, you blush, comrade! Well, manners have changed. All these notions of lawful order, Kantism, and liberty have spoilt the young men. You have no Guimard now, no Duthé, no creditors—and you know nothing of heraldry; why, my dear young friend, you are not fully fledged. The man who does not sow his wild oats in the spring sows them in the winter. If I have but eighty thousand francs a year at the age of seventy, it is because I ran through the capital at thirty. Oh! with my wife—in decency and honour. However, your im-

perfections will not interfere with my introducing you at the Pavillon Planat. Remember you have promised to come, and I shall expect you.'

'What an odd little old man!' said Longueville to himself. 'He is so jolly and hale; but though he wishes to seem a good fellow, I will not trust him too far.'

Next day, at about four o'clock, when the house party were dispersed in the drawing-rooms and billiard-room, a servant announced to the inhabitants of the Villa Planat, 'Monsieur *de* Longueville.' On hearing the name of the old admiral's protégé, every one, down to the player who was about to miss his stroke, rushed in, as much to study Mademoiselle de Fontaine's countenance as to judge of this phœnix of men, who had earned honourable mention to the detriment of so many rivals. A simple but elegant style of dress, an air of perfect ease, polite manners, a pleasant voice with a ring in it which found a response in the hearer's heart-strings, won the goodwill of the family for Monsieur Longueville. He did not seem unaccustomed to the luxury of the Receiver-General's ostentatious mansion. Though his conversation was that of a man of the world, it was easy to discern that he had had a brilliant education, and that his knowledge was as thorough as it was extensive. He knew so well the right thing to say in a discussion on naval architecture, trivial, it is true, started by the old admiral, that one of the ladies remarked that he must have passed through the Ecole Polytechnique.

'And I think, madame,' he replied, 'that I may regard it as an honour to have got in.'

In spite of urgent pressing, he refused politely but firmly to be kept to dinner, and put an end to the persistency of the ladies by saying that he was the Hippocrates of his young sister, whose delicate health required great care.

'Monsieur is perhaps a medical man?' asked one of Emilie's sisters-in-law with ironical meaning.

'Monsieur has left the Ecole Polytechnique,' Made-

moiselle de Fontaine kindly put in; her face had flushed with richer colour, as she learned that the young lady of the ball was Monsieur Longueville's sister.

'But, my dear, he may be a doctor and yet have been to the École Polytechnique—is it not so, Monsieur?

'There is nothing to prevent it, Madame,' replied the young man.

Every eye was on Emilie, who was gazing with uneasy curiosity at the fascinating stranger. She breathed more freely when he added, not without a smile, 'I have not the honour of belonging to the medical profession; and I even gave up going into the Engineers in order to preserve my independence.'

'And you did well,' said the Count. 'But how can you regard it as an honour to be a doctor?' added the Breton nobleman. 'Ah, my young friend, such a man as you——'

'Monsieur le Comte, I respect every profession that has a useful purpose.'

'Well, in that we agree. You respect those professions, I imagine, as a young man respects a dowager.'

Monsieur Longueville made his visit neither too long nor too short. He left at the moment when he saw that he had pleased everybody, and that each one's curiosity about him had been roused.

'He is a cunning rascal!' said the Count, coming into the drawing-room after seeing him to the door.

Mademoiselle de Fontaine, who had been in the secret of this call, had dressed with some care to attract the young man's eye; but she had the little disappointment of finding that he did not bestow on her so much attention as she thought she deserved. The family were a good deal surprised at the silence into which she had retired. Emilie generally displayed all her arts for the benefit of new-comers, her witty prattle, and the inexhaustible eloquence of her eyes and attitudes. Whether it was that the young man's pleasing voice and attractive

manners had charmed her, that she was seriously in love, and that this feeling had worked a change in her, her demeanour had lost all its affectations. Being simple and natural, she must, no doubt, have seemed more beautiful. Some of her sisters, and an old lady, a friend of the family, saw in this behaviour a refinement of art. They supposed that Emilie, judging the man worthy of her, intended to delay revealing her merits, so as to dazzle him suddenly when she found that she pleased him. Every member of the family was curious to know what this capricious creature thought of the stranger; but when, during dinner, every one chose to endow Monsieur Longueville with some fresh quality which no one else had discovered, Mademoiselle de Fontaine sat for some time in silence. A sarcastic remark of her uncle's suddenly roused her from her apathy; she said, somewhat epigrammatically, that such heavenly perfection must cover some great defect, and that she would take good care how she judged so gifted a man at first sight.

'Those who please everybody, please nobody,' she added; 'and the worst of all faults is to have none.'

Like all girls who are in love, Emilie cherished the hope of being able to hide her feelings at the bottom of her heart by putting the Argus-eyes that watched on the wrong tack; but by the end of a fortnight there was not a member of the large family party who was not in this little domestic secret. When Monsieur Longueville called for the third time, Emilie believed it was chiefly for her sake. This discovery gave her such intoxicating pleasure that she was startled as she reflected on it. There was something in it very painful to her pride. Accustomed as she was to be the centre of her world, she was obliged to recognise a force that attracted her outside herself; she tried to resist, but she could not chase from her heart the fascinating image of the young man.

Then came some anxiety. Two of Monsieur Longue-

ville's qualities, very adverse to general curiosity, and especially to Mademoiselle de Fontaine's, were unexpected modesty and discretion. He never spoke of himself, of his pursuits, or of his family. The hints Emilie threw out in conversation, and the traps she laid to extract from the young fellow some facts concerning himself, he could evade with the adroitness of a diplomatist concealing a secret. If she talked of painting, he responded as a connoisseur; if she sat down to play, he showed without conceit that he was a very good pianist; one evening he delighted all the party by joining his delightful voice to Emilie's in one of Cimarosa's charming duets. But when they tried to find out whether he were a professional singer, he baffled them so pleasantly that he did not afford these women, practised as they were in the art of reading feelings, the least chance of discovering to what social sphere he belonged. However boldly the old uncle cast the boarding-hooks over the vessel, Longueville slipped away cleverly, so as to preserve the charm of mystery; and it was easy to him to remain the 'handsome Stranger' at the Villa, because curiosity never overstepped the bounds of good breeding.

Emilie, distracted by this reserve, hoped to get more out of the sister than the brother, in the form of confidences. Aided by her uncle, who was as skilful in such manœuvres as in handling a ship, she endeavoured to bring upon the scene the hitherto unseen figure of Mademoiselle Clara Longueville. The family party at the Villa Planat soon expressed the greatest desire to make the acquaintance of so amiable a young lady, and to give her some amusement. An informal dance was proposed and accepted. The ladies did not despair of making a young girl of sixteen talk.

Notwithstanding the little clouds piled up by suspicion and created by curiosity, a light of joy shone in Emilie's soul, for she found life delicious when thus intimately connected with another than herself. She

began to understand the relations of life. Whether it is that happiness makes us better, or that she was too fully occupied to torment other people, she became less caustic, more gentle, and indulgent. This change in her temper enchanted and amazed her family. Perhaps, at last, her selfishness was being transformed to love. It was a deep delight to her to look for the arrival of her bashful and unconfessed adorer. Though they had not uttered a word of passion, she knew that she was loved, and with what art did she not lead the stranger to unlock the stores of his information, which proved to be varied! She perceived that she, too, was being studied, and that made her endeavour to remedy the defects her education had encouraged. Was not this her first homage to love, and a bitter reproach to herself? She desired to please, and she was enchanting; she loved, and she was idolised. Her family, knowing that her pride would sufficiently protect her, gave her enough freedom to enjoy the little childish delights which give to first love its charm and its violence. More than once the young man and Mademoiselle de Fontaine walked, *tête-à-tête*, in the avenues of the garden, where nature was dressed like a woman going to a ball. More than once they had those conversations, aimless and meaningless, in which the emptiest phrases are those which cover the deepest feelings. They often admired together the setting sun and its gorgeous colouring. They gathered daisies to pull the petals off, and sang the most impassioned duets, using the notes set down by Pergolesi or Rossini as faithful interpreters to express their secrets.

The day of the dance came. Clara Longueville and her brother, whom the servants persisted in honouring with the noble *de*, were the principal guests. For the first time in her life Mademoiselle de Fontaine felt pleasure in a young girl's triumph. She lavished on Clara in all sincerity the gracious petting and little attentions which women generally give each other only to excite the

jealousy of men. Emilie had, indeed, an object in view; she wanted to discover some secrets. But, being a girl, Mademoiselle Longueville showed even more mother-wit than her brother, for she did not even look as if she were hiding a secret, and kept the conversation to subjects unconnected with personal interests, while, at the same time, she gave it so much charm that Mademoiselle de Fontaine was almost envious, and called her 'the Siren.' Though Emilie had intended to make Clara talk, it was Clara, in fact, who questioned Emilie; she had meant to judge her, and she was judged by her; she was constantly provoked to find that she had betrayed her own character in some reply which Clara had extracted from her, while her modest and candid manner prohibited any suspicion of perfidy. There was a moment when Mademoiselle de Fontaine seemed sorry for an ill-judged sally against the commonalty to which Clara had led her.

'Mademoiselle,' said the sweet child, 'I have heard so much of you from Maximilien that I had the keenest desire to know you, out of affection for him; but is not a wish to know you a wish to love you?'

'My dear Clara, I feared I might have displeased you by speaking thus of people who are not of noble birth.'

'Oh, be quite easy. That sort of discussion is pointless in these days. As for me, it does not affect me. I am beside the question.'

Ambitious as the answer might seem, it filled Mademoiselle de Fontaine with the deepest joy; for, like all infatuated people, she explained it, as oracles are explained, in the sense that harmonised with her wishes; she began dancing again in higher spirits than ever, as she watched Longueville, whose figure and grace almost surpassed those of her imaginary ideal. She felt added satisfaction in believing him to be well born, her black eyes sparkled, and she danced with all the pleasure that comes of dancing in the presence of the being we love. The couple had never understood each other so well as

at this moment; more than once they felt their finger tips thrill and tremble as they were married in the figures of the dance.

The early autumn had come to the handsome pair, in the midst of country festivities and pleasures; they had abandoned themselves softly to the tide of the sweetest sentiment in life, strengthening it by a thousand little incidents which any one can imagine; for love is in some respects always the same. They studied each other through it all, as much as lovers can.

'Well, well; a flirtation never turned so quickly into a love match,' said the old uncle, who kept an eye on the two young people as a naturalist watches an insect in the microscope.

This speech alarmed Monsieur and Madame Fontaine. The old Vendéen had ceased to be so indifferent to his daughter's prospects as he had promised to be. He went to Paris to seek information, and found none. Uneasy at this mystery, and not yet knowing what might be the outcome of the inquiry which he had begged a Paris friend to institute with reference to the family of Longueville, he thought it his duty to warn his daughter to behave prudently. The fatherly admonition was received with mock submission spiced with irony.

'At least, my dear Emilie, if you love him, do not own it to him.'

'My dear father, I certainly do love him; but I will await your permission before I tell him so.'

'But remember, Emilie, you know nothing of his family or his pursuits.'

'I may be ignorant, but I am content to be. But, father, you wished to see me married; you left me at liberty to make my choice; my choice is irrevocably made—what more is needful?'

'It is needful to ascertain, my dear, whether the man of your choice is the son of a peer of France,' the venerable gentleman retorted sarcastically.

Emilie was silent for a moment. She presently raised her head, looked at her father, and said somewhat anxiously, 'Are not the Longuevilles——?'

'They became extinct in the person of the old Duc de Rostein-Limbourg, who perished on the scaffold in 1793. He was the last representative of the last and younger branch.'

'But, papa, there are some very good families descended from bastards. The history of France swarms with princes bearing the bar sinister on their shields.'

'Your ideas are much changed,' said the old man, with a smile.

The following day was the last that the Fontaine family were to spend at the Pavillon Planat. Emilie, greatly disturbed by her father's warning, awaited with extreme impatience the hour at which young Longueville was in the habit of coming, to wring some explanation from him. She went out after dinner, and walked alone across the shrubbery towards an arbour fit for lovers, where she knew that the eager youth would seek her; and as she hastened thither she considered of the best way to discover so important a matter without compromising herself—a rather difficult thing! Hitherto no direct avowal had sanctioned the feelings which bound her to this stranger. Like Maximilien, she had secretly enjoyed the sweetness of first love; but both were equally proud, and each feared to confess that love.

Maximilien Longueville, to whom Clara had communicated her not unfounded suspicions as to Emilie's character, was by turns carried away by the violence of a young man's passion, and held back by a wish to know and test the woman to whom he would be entrusting his happiness. His love had not hindered him from perceiving in Emilie the prejudices which marred her young nature; but before attempting to counteract them, he wished to be sure that she loved him, for he would no sooner risk the fate of his love than of his life. He had, therefore,

persistently kept a silence to which his looks, his behaviour, and his smallest actions gave the lie.

On her side the self-respect natural to a young girl, augmented in Mademoiselle de Fontaine by the monstrous vanity founded on her birth and beauty, kept her from meeting the declaration half-way, which her growing passion sometimes urged her to invite. Thus the lovers had instinctively understood the situation without explaining to each other their secret motives. There are times in life when such vagueness pleases youthful minds. Just because each had postponed speaking too long, they seemed to be playing a cruel game of suspense. He was trying to discover whether he was beloved, by the effort any confession would cost his haughty mistress; she every minute hoped that he would break a too respectful silence.

Emilie, seated on a rustic bench, was reflecting on all that had happened in these three months full of enchantment. Her father's suspicions were the last that could appeal to her; she even disposed of them at once by two or three of those reflections natural to an inexperienced girl, which, to her, seemed conclusive. Above all, she was convinced that it was impossible that she should deceive herself. All the summer through she had not been able to detect in Maximilien a single gesture, or a single word, which could indicate a vulgar origin or vulgar occupations; nay more, his manner of discussing things revealed a man devoted to the highest interests of the nation. 'Besides,' she reflected, 'an office clerk, a banker, or a merchant, would not be at leisure to spend a whole season in paying his addresses to me in the midst of woods and fields; wasting his time as freely as a nobleman who has life before him free of all care.'

She had given herself up to meditations far more interesting to her than these preliminary thoughts, when a slight rustling in the leaves announced to her that Maximilien had been watching her for a minute, not probably without admiration.

'Do you know that it is very wrong to take a young girl thus unawares?' she asked him, smiling.

'Especially when they are busy with their secrets,' replied Maximilien archly.

'Why should I not have my secrets? You certainly have yours.'

'Then you really were thinking of your secrets?' he went on, laughing.

'No, I was thinking of yours. My own, I know.'

'But perhaps my secrets are yours, and yours mine, cried the young man, softly seizing Mademoiselle de Fontaine's hand and drawing it through his arm.

After walking a few steps they found themselves under a clump of trees which the hues of the sinking sun wrapped in a haze of red and brown. This touch of natural magic lent a certain solemnity to the moment. The young man's free and eager action, and, above all, the throbbing of his surging heart, whose hurried beating spoke to Emilie's arm, stirred her to an emotion that was all the more disturbing because it was produced by the simplest and most innocent circumstances. The restraint under which young girls of the upper class live gives incredible force to any explosion of feeling, and to meet an impassioned lover is one of the greatest dangers they can encounter. Never had Emilie and Maximilien allowed their eyes to say so much that they dared never speak. Carried away by this intoxication, they easily forgot the petty stipulations of pride, and the cold hesitancies of suspicion. At first, indeed, they could only express themselves by a pressure of hands which interpreted their happy thoughts.

After slowly pacing a few steps in long silence, Mademoiselle de Fontaine spoke. 'Monsieur, I have a question to ask you,' she said, trembling, and in an agitated voice. 'But, remember, I beg, that it is in a manner compulsory on me, from the rather singular position I am in with regard to my family.'

A pause, terrible to Emilie, followed these sentences, which she had almost stammered out. During the minute while it lasted, the girl, haughty as she was, dared not meet the flashing eye of the man she loved, for she was secretly conscious of the meanness of the next words she added: 'Are you of noble birth?'

As soon as the words were spoken she wished herself at the bottom of a lake.

'Mademoiselle,' Longueville gravely replied, and his face assumed a sort of stern dignity, 'I promise to answer you truly as soon as you shall have answered in all sincerity a question I will put to you!'—He released her arm, and the girl suddenly felt alone in the world, as he said: 'What is your object in questioning me as to my birth?'

She stood motionless, cold, and speechless.

'Mademoiselle,' Maximilien went on, 'let us go no further if we do not understand each other. I love you,' he said, in a voice of deep emotion. 'Well, then,' he added, as he heard the joyful exclamation she could not suppress, 'why ask me if I am of noble birth?'

'Could he speak so if he were not?' cried a voice within her, which Emilie believed came from the depths of her heart. She gracefully raised her head, seemed to find new life in the young man's gaze, and held out her hand as if to renew the alliance.

'You thought I cared very much for dignities?' said she with keen archness.

'I have no titles to offer my wife,' he replied, in a half-sportive, half-serious tone. 'But if I choose one of high rank, and among women whom a wealthy home has accustomed to the luxury and pleasures of a fine fortune, I know what such a choice requires of me. Love gives everything,' he added lightly, 'but only to lovers. Once married, they need something more than the vault of heaven and the carpet of a meadow.'

'He is rich,' she reflected. 'As to titles, perhaps he only wants to try me. He has been told that I am mad

about titles, and bent on marrying none but a peer's son. My priggish sisters have played me that trick.'—'I assure you, Monsieur,' she said aloud, 'that I have had very extravagant ideas about life and the world; but now,' she addedly pointedly, looking at him in a perfectly distracting way, 'I know where true riches are to be found for a wife.'

'I must believe that you are speaking from the depths of your heart,' he said, with gentle gravity. 'But this winter, my dear Emilie, in less than two months perhaps, I may be proud of what I shall have to offer you if you care for the pleasures of wealth. This is the only secret I shall keep locked here,' and he laid his hand on his heart, 'for on its success my happiness depends. I dare not say ours.'

'Yes, yes, ours!'

Exchanging such sweet nothings, they slowly made their way back to rejoin the company. Mademoiselle de Fontaine had never found her lover more amiable or wittier; his light figure, his engaging manners, seemed to her more charming than ever, since the conversation which had made her to some extent the possessor of a heart worthy to be the envy of every woman. They sang an Italian duet with so much expression that the audience applauded enthusiastically. Their adieux were in a conventional tone, which concealed their happiness. In short, this day had been to Emilie like a chain binding her more closely than ever to the Stranger's fate. The strength and dignity he had displayed in the scene when they had confessed their feelings had perhaps impressed Mademoiselle de Fontaine with the respect without which there is no true love.

When she was left alone in the drawing-room with her father, the old man went up to her affectionately, held her hands, and asked her whether she had gained any light as to Monsieur Longueville's family and fortune.

'Yes, my dear father,' she replied, 'and I am happier

than I could have hoped. In short, Monsieur de Longueville is the only man I could ever marry.'

'Very well, Emilie,' said the Count, 'then I know what remains for me to do.'

'Do you know of any impediment?' she asked, in sincere alarm.

'My dear child, the young man is totally unknown to me; but unless he is not a man of honour, so long as you love him, he is as dear to me as a son.'

'Not a man of honour!' exclaimed Emilie. 'As to that, I am quite easy. My uncle, who introduced him to us, will answer for him. Say, my dear uncle, has he been a filibuster, an outlaw, a pirate?'

'I knew I should find myself in this fix!' cried the old sailor, waking up. He looked round the room, but his niece had vanished 'like Saint-Elmo's fires,' to use his favourite expression.

'Well, uncle,' Monsieur de Fontaine went on, 'how could you hide from us all you knew about this young man? You must have seen how anxious we have been. Is Monsieur de Longueville a man of family?'

'I don't know him from Adam or Eve,' said the Comte de Kergarouët. 'Trusting to that crazy child's tact, I got him here by a method of my own. I know that the boy shoots with a pistol to admiration, hunts well, plays wonderfully at billiards, at chess, and at backgammon; he handles the foils, and rides a horse like the late Chevalier de Saint-Georges. He has a thorough knowledge of all our vintages. He is as good an arithmetician as Barême, draws, dances, and sings well. The devil's in it! what more do you want? If that is not a perfect gentleman, find me a *bourgeois* who knows all this, or any man who lives more nobly than he does. Does he do anything, I ask you? Does he compromise his dignity by hanging about an office, bowing down before the upstarts you call Directors-General? He walks upright. He is a man.—However, I have just

found in my waistcoat pocket the card he gave when he fancied I wanted to cut his throat, poor innocent. Young men are very simple-minded nowadays! Here it is.'

'Rue du Sentier, No. 5,' said Monsieur de Fontaine, trying to recall among all the information he had received, something which might concern the stranger. 'What the devil can it mean? Messrs. Palma, Werbrust & Co., wholesale dealers in muslins, calicoes, and printed cotton goods, live there.—Stay, I have it: Longueville the deputy has an interest in their house. Well, but so far as I know, Longueville has but one son of two-and-thirty, who is not at all like our man, and to whom he gave fifty thousand francs a year that he might marry a minister's daughter; he wants to be made a peer like the rest of 'em.—I never heard him mention this Maximilien. Has he a daughter? What is this girl Clara? Besides, it is open to any adventurer to call himself Longueville. But is not the house of Palma, Werbrust & Co. half ruined by some speculation in Mexico or the Indies? I will clear all this up.'

'You speak a soliloquy as if you were on the stage, and seem to account me a cypher,' said the old admiral suddenly. 'Don't you know that if he is a gentleman, I have more than one bag in my hold that will stop any leak in his fortune?'

'As to that, if he is a son of Longueville's, he will want nothing; but,' said Monsieur de Fontaine, shaking his head from side to side, 'his father has not even washed off the stains of his origin. Before the Revolution he was an attorney, and the *de* he has since assumed no more belongs to him than half of his fortune.'

'Pooh! pooh! happy those whose fathers were hanged!' cried the admiral gaily.

Three or four days after this memorable day, on one of those fine mornings in the month of November, which show the Boulevards cleaned by the sharp cold of an

early frost, Mademoiselle de Fontaine, wrapped in a new style of fur cape, of which she wished to set the fashion, went out with two of her sisters-in-law, on whom she had been wont to discharge her most cutting remarks. The three women were tempted to the drive, less by their desire to try a very elegant carriage, and wear gowns which were to set the fashions for the winter, than by their wish to see a cape which a friend had observed in a handsome lace and linen shop at the corner of the Rue de la Paix. As soon as they were in the shop the Baronne de Fontaine pulled Emilie by the sleeve, and pointed out to her Maximilien Longueville seated behind the desk, and engaged in paying out the change for a gold piece to one of the workwomen with whom he seemed to be in consultation. The 'handsome stranger' held in his hand a parcel of patterns, which left no doubt as to his honourable profession.

Emilie felt an icy shudder, though no one perceived it. Thanks to the good breeding of the best society, she completely concealed the rage in her heart, and answered her sister-in-law with the words, 'I knew it,' with a fulness of intonation and inimitable decision which the most famous actress of the time might have envied her. She went straight up to the desk. Longueville looked up, put the patterns in his pocket with distracting coolness, bowed to Mademoiselle de Fontaine, and came forward, looking at her keenly.

'Mademoiselle,' he said to the shop girl, who followed him, looking very much disturbed, 'I will send to settle that account; my house deals in that way. But here,' he whispered into her ear, as he gave her a thousand-franc note, 'take this—it is between ourselves.—You will forgive me, I trust, Mademoiselle,' he added, turning to Emilie. 'You will kindly excuse the tyranny of business matters.'

'Indeed, Monsieur, it seems to me that it is no concern of mine,' replied Mademoiselle de Fontaine, looking at

him with a bold expression of sarcastic indifference which might have made any one believe that she now saw him for the first time.

'Do you really mean it?' asked Maximilien in a broken voice.

Emilie turned her back upon him with amazing insolence. These few words, spoken in an undertone, had escaped the ears of her two sisters-in-law. When, after buying the cape, the three ladies got into the carriage again, Emilie, seated with her back to the horses, could not resist one last comprehensive glance into the depths of the odious shop, where she saw Maximilien standing with his arms folded, in the attitude of a man superior to the disaster that had so suddenly fallen on him. Their eyes met and flashed implacable looks. Each hoped to inflict a cruel wound on the heart of a lover. In one instant they were as far apart as if one had been in China and the other in Greenland.

Does not the breath of vanity wither everything? Mademoiselle de Fontaine, a prey to the most violent struggle that can torture the heart of a young girl, reaped the richest harvest of anguish that prejudice and narrow-mindedness ever sowed in a human soul. Her face, but just now fresh and velvety, was streaked with yellow lines and red patches; the paleness of her cheeks seemed every now and then to turn green. Hoping to hide her despair from her sisters, she would laugh as she pointed out some ridiculous dress or passer-by; but her laughter was spasmodic. She was more deeply hurt by their unspoken compassion than by any satirical comments for which she might have revenged herself. She exhausted her wit in trying to engage them in a conversation, in which she tried to expend her fury in senseless paradoxes, heaping on all men engaged in trade the bitterest insults and witticisms in the worst taste.

On getting home, she had an attack of fever, which at first assumed a somewhat serious character. By the end

of a month the care of her parents and of the physician restored her to her family.

Every one hoped that this lesson would be severe enough to subdue Emilie's nature; but she insensibly fell into her old habits and threw herself again into the world of fashion. She declared that there was no disgrace in making a mistake. If she, like her father, had a vote in the Chamber, she would move for an edict, she said, by which all merchants, and especially dealers in calico, should be branded on the forehead, like Berri sheep, down to the third generation. She wished that none but nobles should have a right to wear the antique French costume, which was so becoming to the courtiers of Louis XV. To hear her, it was a misfortune for France, perhaps, that there was no outward and visible difference between a merchant and a peer of France. And a hundred more such pleasantries, easy to imagine, were rapidly poured out when any accident brought up the subject.

But those who loved Emilie could see through all her banter a tinge of melancholy. It was clear that Maximilien Longueville still reigned over that inexorable heart. Sometimes she would be as gentle as she had been during the brief summer that had seen the birth of her love; sometimes, again, she was unendurable. Every one made excuses for her inequality of temper, which had its source in sufferings at once secret and known to all. The Comte de Kergarouët had some influence over her thanks to his increased prodigality, a kind of consolation which rarely fails of its effect on a Parisian girl.

The first ball at which Mademoiselle de Fontaine appeared was at the Neapolitan ambassador's. As she took her place in the first quadrille she saw, a few yards away from her, Maximilien Longueville, who nodded slightly to her partner.

'Is that young man a friend of yours?' she asked, with a scornful air.

'Only my brother,' he replied.

Emilie could not help starting. 'Ah!' he continued, 'and he is the noblest soul living——'

'Do you know my name?' asked Emilie, eagerly interrupting him.

'No, Mademoiselle. It is a crime, I confess, not to remember a name which is on every lip—I ought to say in every heart. But I have a valid excuse. I have but just arrived from Germany. My ambassador, who is in Paris on leave, sent me here this evening to take care of his amiable wife, whom you may see yonder in that corner.'

'A perfect tragic mask!' said Emilie, after looking at the ambassadress.

'And yet that is her ballroom face!' said the young man, laughing. 'I shall have to dance with her! So I thought I might have some compensation.' Mademoiselle de Fontaine curtseyed. 'I was very much surprised,' the voluble young secretary went on, 'to find my brother here. On arriving from Vienna I heard that the poor boy was ill in bed, and I counted on seeing him before coming to this ball; but good policy will not always allow us to indulge family affection. The *Padrona della casa* would not give me time to call on my poor Maximilien.'

'Then, Monsieur, your brother is not, like you, in diplomatic employment.'

'No,' said the attaché, with a sigh, 'the poor fellow sacrificed himself for me. He and my sister Clara have renounced their share of my father's fortune to make an eldest son of me. My father dreams of a peerage, like all who vote for the ministry. Indeed, it is promised him,' he added in an undertone. 'After saving up a little capital my brother joined a banking firm, and I hear he has just effected a speculation in Brazil which may make him a millionaire. You see me in the highest spirits at having been able, by my diplomatic connections, to contribute to his success. I am impatiently expecting a dis-

patch from the Brazilian Legation, which will help to lift the cloud from his brow. What do you think of him?'

'Well, your brother's face does not look to me like that of a man busied with money matters.'

The young attaché shot a scrutinising glance at the apparently calm face of his partner.

'What!' he exclaimed, with a smile, 'can young ladies read the thoughts of love behind a silent brow?'

'Your brother is in love, then?' she asked, betrayed into a movement of curiosity.

'Yes; my sister Clara, to whom he is as devoted as a mother, wrote to me that he had fallen in love this summer with a very pretty girl; but I have had no further news of the affair. Would you believe that the poor boy used to get up at five in the morning, and went off to settle his business that he might be back by four o'clock in the country where the lady was? In fact, he ruined a very nice thoroughbred that I had given him. Forgive my chatter, Mademoiselle; I have but just come home from Germany. For a year I have heard no decent French, I have been weaned from French faces, and satiated with Germans, to such a degree that, I believe, in my patriotic mania, I could talk to the chimeras on a French candlestick. And if I talk with a lack of reserve unbecoming in a diplomatist, the fault is yours, Mademoiselle. Was it not you who pointed out my brother? When he is the theme I become inexhaustible. I should like to proclaim to all the world how good and generous he is. He gave up no less than a hundred thousand francs a year, the income from the Longueville property.'

If Mademoiselle de Fontaine had the benefit of these important revelations, it was partly due to the skill with which she continued to question her confiding partner from the moment when she found that he was the brother of her scorned lover.

'And could you, without being grieved, see your

brother selling muslin and calico?' asked Emilie, at the end of the third figure of the quadrille.

'How do you know that?' asked the attaché. 'Thank God, though I pour out a flood of words, I have already acquired the art of not telling more than I intend, like all the other diplomatic apprentices I know.'

'You told me, I assure you.'

Monsieur de Longueville looked at Mademoiselle de Fontaine with a surprise that was full of perspicacity. A suspicion flashed upon him. He glanced enquiringly from his brother to his partner, guessed everything, clasped his hands, fixed his eyes on the ceiling, and began to laugh, saying, 'I am an idiot! You are the handsomest person here; my brother keeps stealing glances at you; he is dancing in spite of his illness, and you pretend not to see him. Make him happy,' he added, as he led her back to her old uncle. 'I shall not be jealous, but I shall always shiver a little at calling you my sister——'

The lovers, however, were to prove as inexorable to each other as they were to themselves. At about two in the morning, refreshments were served in an immense corridor, where, to leave persons of the same coterie free to meet each other, the tables were arranged as in a restaurant. By one of those accidents which always happen to lovers, Mademoiselle de Fontaine found herself at a table next to that at which the more important guests were seated. Maximilien was one of the group. Emilie, who lent an attentive ear to her neighbours' conversation, overheard one of those dialogues into which a young woman so easily falls with a young man who has the grace and style of Maximilien Longueville. The lady talking to the young banker was a Neapolitan Duchess, whose eyes shot lightning flashes, and whose skin had the sheen of satin. The intimate terms on which Longueville affected to be with her stung Mademoiselle de Fontaine all the more because she had just given her lover back twenty times as much tenderness as she had ever felt for him before.

'Yes, Monsieur, in my country true love can make every kind of sacrifice,' the Duchess was saying, with a simper.

'You have more passion than Frenchwomen,' said Maximilien, whose burning gaze fell on Emilie. 'They are all vanity.'

'Monsieur,' Emilie eagerly interposed, 'is it not very wrong to calumniate your own country? Devotion is to be found in every nation.'

'Do you imagine, Mademoiselle,' retorted the Italian, with a sardonic smile, 'that a Parisian would be capable of following her lover all over the world?'

'Oh, Madame, let us understand each other. She would follow him to a desert and live in a tent, but not to sit in a shop.'

A disdainful gesture completed her meaning. Thus, under the influence of her disastrous education, Emilie for the second time killed her budding happiness, and destroyed its prospects of life. Maximilien's apparent indifference, and a woman's smile, had wrung from her one of those sarcasms whose treacherous zest always led her astray.

'Mademoiselle,' said Longueville, in a low voice, under cover of the noise made by the ladies as they rose from the table, 'no one will ever more ardently desire your happiness than I; permit me to assure you of this, as I am taking leave of you. I am starting for Italy in a few days.'

'With a Duchess, no doubt?'

'No, but perhaps with a mortal blow.'

'Is not that pure fancy?' asked Emilie, with an anxious glance.

'No,' he replied. 'There are wounds which never heal.'

'You are not to go,' said the girl imperiously, and she smiled.

'I shall go,' replied Maximilien, gravely.

'You will find me married on your return, I warn you,' she said coquettishly.

'I hope so.'

'Impertinent wretch!' she exclaimed. 'How cruel a revenge!'

A fortnight later Maximilien set out with his sister Clara for the warm and poetic scenes of beautiful Italy, leaving Mademoiselle de Fontaine a prey to the most vehement regret. The young Secretary to the Embassy took up his brother's quarrel, and contrived to take signal vengeance on Emilie's disdain by making known the occasion of the lovers' separation. He repaid his fair partner with interest all the sarcasm with which she had formerly attacked Maximilien, and often made more than one Excellency smile by describing the fair foe of the counting-house, the amazon who preached a crusade against bankers, the young girl whose love had evaporated before a bale of muslin. The Comte de Fontaine was obliged to use his influence to procure an appointment to Russia for Auguste Longueville in order to protect his daughter from the ridicule heaped upon her by this dangerous young persecutor.

Not long after, the Ministry being compelled to raise a levy of peers to support the aristocratic party, trembling in the Upper Chamber under the lash of an illustrious writer, gave Monsieur Guiraudin de Longueville a peerage, with the title of Vicomte. Monsieur de Fontaine also obtained a peerage, the reward due as much to his fidelity in evil days as to his name, which claimed a place in the hereditary Chamber.

About this time Emilie, now of age, made, no doubt, some serious reflections on life, for her tone and manners changed perceptibly. Instead of amusing herself by saying spiteful things to her uncle, she lavished on him the most affectionate attentions; she brought him his stick with a persevering devotion that made the cynical smile, she gave him her arm, rode in his carriage, and accompanied him in all his drives; she even persuaded him that she liked the smell of tobacco, and read him his favourite

paper *La Quotidienne* in the midst of clouds of smoke, which the malicious old sailor intentionally blew over her; she learned piquet to be a match for the old Count; and this fantastic damsel even listened without impatience to his periodical narratives of the battles of the *Belle-Poule*, the manœuvres of the *Ville de Paris*, M. de Suffren's first expedition, or the battle of Aboukir.

Though the old sailor had often said that he knew his longitude and latitude too well to allow himself to be captured by a young corvette, one fine morning Paris drawing-rooms heard the news of the marriage of Mademoiselle de Fontaine to the Comte de Kergarouët. The young Comtesse gave splendid entertainments to drown thought; but she, no doubt, found a void at the bottom of the whirlpool; luxury was ineffectual to disguise the emptiness and grief of her sorrowing soul; for the most part, in spite of the flashes of assumed gaiety, her beautiful face expressed unspoken melancholy. Emilie appeared, however, full of attentions and consideration for her old husband, who, on retiring to his rooms at night, to the sounds of a lively band, would often say, 'I do not know myself. Was I to wait till the age of seventy-two to embark as pilot on board the *Belle Emilie* after twenty years of matrimonial galleys?'

The conduct of the young Comtesse was marked by such strictness that the most clear-sighted criticism had no fault to find with her. Lookers on chose to think that the vice-admiral had reserved the right of disposing of his fortune to keep his wife more tightly in hand; but this was a notion as insulting to the uncle as to the niece. Their conduct was indeed so delicately judicious that the men who were most interested in guessing the secrets of the couple could never decide whether the old Count regarded her as a wife or as a daughter. He was often heard to say that he had rescued his niece as a castaway after shipwreck; and that, for his part, he had never taken a mean advantage of hospitality when he had saved an

enemy from the fury of the storm. Though the Comtesse aspired to reign in Paris and tried to keep pace with Mesdames the Duchesses de Maufrigneuse and de Chaulieu, the Marquises d'Espard and d'Aiglemont, the Comtesses Féraud, de Montcornet, and de Restaud, Madame de Camps, and Mademoiselle des Touches, she did not yield to the addresses of the young Vicomte de Portenduère, who made her his idol.

Two years after her marriage, in one of the old drawing-rooms in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where she was admired for her character, worthy of the old school, Emilie heard the Vicomte de Longueville announced. In the corner of the room where she was sitting, playing piquet with the Bishop of Persepolis, her agitation was not observed; she turned her head and saw her former lover come in, in all the freshness of youth. His father's death, and then that of his brother, killed by the severe climate of Saint-Petersburg, had placed on Maximilien's head the hereditary plumes of the French peer's hat. His fortune matched his learning and his merits; only the day before his youthful and fervid eloquence had dazzled the Assembly. At this moment he stood before the Comtesse, free, and graced with all the advantages she had formerly required of her ideal. Every mother with a daughter to marry made amiable advances to a man gifted with the virtues which they attributed to him, as they admired his attractive person; but Emilie knew, better than any one, that the Vicomte de Longueville had the steadfast nature in which a wise woman sees a guarantee of happiness. She looked at the admiral who, to use his favourite expression, seemed likely to hold his course for a long time yet, and cursed the follies of her youth.

At this moment Monsieur de Persepolis said with Episcopal grace: 'Fair lady, you have thrown away the king of hearts—I have won. But do not regret your money. I keep it for my little seminaries.'

PARIS, *December* 1829.

THE PURSE

To Sofka.

'Have you observed, Mademoiselle, that the painters and sculptors of the Middle Ages, when they placed two figures in adoration, one on each side of a fair Saint, never failed to give them a family likeness? When you here see your name among those that are dear to me, and under whose auspices I place my works, remember that touching harmony, and you will see in this not so much an act of homage as an expression of the brotherly affection of your devoted servant,

'DE BALZAC.'

FOR souls to whom effusiveness is easy there is a delicious hour that falls when it is not yet night, but is no longer day; the twilight gleam throws softened lights or tricksy reflections on every object, and favours a dreamy mood which vaguely weds itself to the play of light and shade. The silence which generally prevails at that time makes it particularly dear to artists, who grow contemplative, stand a few paces back from the pictures on which they can no longer work, and pass judgment on them, rapt by the subject whose most recondite meaning then flashes on the inner eye of genius. He who has never stood pensive by a friend's side in such an hour of poetic dreaming can hardly understand its inexpressible soothingness. Favoured by the clear-obscure, the material skill employed by art to produce illusion entirely disappears. If the work is a picture, the figures represented seem to speak and walk; the shade is shadow,

the light is day; the flesh lives, eyes move, blood flows in their veins, and stuffs have a changing sheen. Imagination helps the realism of every detail, and only sees the beauties of the work. At that hour illusion reigns despotically; perhaps it wakes at night-fall! Is not illusion a sort of night to the mind, which we people with dreams? Illusion then unfolds its wings, it bears the soul aloft to the world of fancies, a world full of voluptuous imaginings, where the artist forgets the real world, yesterday and the morrow, the future—everything down to its miseries, the good and the evil alike.

At this magic hour a young painter, a man of talent, who saw in art nothing but Art itself, was perched on a step-ladder which helped him to work at a large high painting, now nearly finished. Criticising himself, honestly admiring himself, floating on the current of his thoughts, he then lost himself in one of those meditative moods which ravish and elevate the soul, soothe it, and comfort it. His reverie had no doubt lasted a long time. Night fell. Whether he meant to come down from his perch, or whether he made some ill-judged movement, believing himself to be on the floor—the event did not allow of his remembering exactly the cause of his accident—he fell, his head struck a footstool, he lost consciousness and lay motionless during a space of time of which he knew not the length.

A sweet voice roused him from the stunned condition into which he had sunk. When he opened his eyes the flash of a bright light made him close them again immediately; but through the mist that veiled his senses he heard the whispering of two women, and felt two young, two timid hands on which his head was resting. He soon recovered consciousness, and by the light of an old-fashioned Argand lamp he could make out the most charming girl's face he had ever seen, one of those heads which are often supposed to be a freak of the brush, but which to him suddenly realised the theories of the ideal beauty which every artist creates for himself and whence

his art proceeds. The features of the unknown belonged, so to say, to the refined and delicate type of Prudhon's school, but had also the poetic sentiment which Girodet gave to the inventions of his phantasy. The freshness of the temples, the regular arch of the eyebrows, the purity of outline, the virginal innocence so plainly stamped on every feature of her countenance, made the girl a perfect creature. Her figure was slight and graceful, and frail in form. Her dress, though simple and neat, revealed neither wealth nor penury.

As he recovered his senses, the painter gave expression to his admiration by a look of surprise, and stammered some confused thanks. He found a handkerchief pressed to his forehead, and above the smell peculiar to a studio, he recognised the strong odour of ether, applied no doubt to revive him from his fainting fit. Finally he saw an old woman, looking like a marquise of the old school, who held the lamp and was advising the young girl.

'Monsieur,' said the younger woman in reply to one of the questions put by the painter during the few minutes when he was still under the influence of the vagueness that the shock had produced in his ideas, 'my mother and I heard the noise of your fall on the floor, and we fancied we heard a groan. The silence following on the crash alarmed us, and we hurried up. Finding the key in the latch, we happily took the liberty of entering, and we found you lying motionless on the ground. My mother went to fetch what was needed to bathe your head and revive you. You have cut your forehead—there. Do you feel it?'

'Yes, I do now,' he replied.

'Oh, it will be nothing,' said the old mother. 'Happily your head rested against this lay-figure.'

'I feel infinitely better,' replied the painter. 'I need nothing further but a hackney cab to take me home. The porter's wife will go for one.'

He tried to repeat his thanks to the two strangers; but

at each sentence the elder lady interrupted him, saying, 'To-morrow, Monsieur, pray be careful to put on leeches, or to be bled, and drink a few cups of something healing. A fall may be dangerous.'

The young girl stole a look at the painter and at the pictures in the studio. Her expression and her glances revealed perfect propriety; her curiosity seemed rather absence of mind, and her eyes seemed to speak the interest which women feel, with the most engaging spontaneity, in everything which causes us suffering. The two strangers seemed to forget the painter's works in the painter's mishap. When he had reassured them as to his condition they left, looking at him with an anxiety that was equally free from insistance and from familiarity, without asking any indiscreet questions, or trying to incite him to any wish to visit them. Their proceedings all bore the hall-mark of natural refinement and good taste. Their noble and simple manners at first made no great impression on the painter, but subsequently, as he recalled all the details of the incident, he was greatly struck by them.

When they reached the floor beneath that occupied by the painter's studio, the old lady gently observed, 'Adélaïde, you left the door open.'

'That was to come to my assistance,' said the painter, with a grateful smile.

'You came down just now, mother,' replied the young girl, with a blush.

'Would you like us to accompany you all the way downstairs?' asked the mother. 'The stairs are dark.'

'No thank you, indeed, Madame; I am much better.'

'Hold tightly by the rail.'

The two women remained on the landing to light the young man, listening to the sound of his steps.

In order to set forth clearly all the exciting and unexpected interest this scene might have for the young

painter, it must be told that he had only a few days since established his studio in the attics of this house, situated in the darkest and, therefore, the most muddy part of the Rue de Suresnes, almost opposite the Church of the Madeleine, and quite close to his rooms in the Rue des Champs-Elyseés. The fame his talent had won him having made him one of the artists most dear to his country, he was beginning to feel free from want, and, to use his own expression, was enjoying his last privations. Instead of going to his work in one of the studios near the city gates, where the moderate rents had hitherto been in proportion to his humble earnings, he had gratified a wish that was new every morning, by sparing himself a long walk, and the loss of much time, now more valuable than ever.

No man in the world would have inspired feelings of greater interest than Hippolyte Schinner if he would ever have consented to make acquaintance; but he did not lightly entrust to others the secrets of his life. He was the idol of a necessitous mother, who had brought him up at the cost of the severest privations. Mademoiselle Schinner, the daughter of an Alsatian farmer, had never been married. Her tender soul had been cruelly crushed, long ago, by a rich man, who did not pride himself on any great delicacy in his love affairs. The day when, as a young girl, in all the radiance of her beauty and all the triumph of her life, she suffered, at the cost of her heart and her sweet illusions, the disenchantment which falls on us so slowly and yet so quickly—for we try to postpone as long as possible our belief in evil, and it seems to come too soon—that day was a whole age of reflection, and it was also a day of religious thought and resignation. She refused the alms of the man who had betrayed her, renounced the world, and made a glory of her shame. She gave herself up entirely to her motherly love, seeking in it all her joys in exchange for the social pleasures to which she bid farewell. She lived by work, saving up a treasure in her son. And,

in after years, a day, an hour repaid her amply for the long and weary sacrifices of her indigence.

At the last exhibition her son had received the Cross of the Legion of Honour. The newspapers, unanimous in hailing an unknown genius, still rang with sincere praises. Artists themselves acknowledged Schinner as a master, and dealers covered his canvasses with gold pieces. At five-and-twenty Hippolyte Schinner, to whom his mother had transmitted her woman's soul, understood more clearly than ever his position in the world. Anxious to restore to his mother the pleasures of which society had so long robbed her, he lived for her, hoping by the aid of fame and fortune to see her one day happy, rich, respected, and surrounded by men of mark. Schinner had therefore chosen his friends among the most honourable and distinguished men. Fastidious in the selection of his intimates, he desired to raise still further a position which his talent had placed high. The work to which he had devoted himself from boyhood, by compelling him to dwell in solitude—the mother of great thoughts—had left him the beautiful beliefs which grace the early days of life. His adolescent soul was not closed to any of the thousand bashful emotions by which a young man is a being apart, whose heart abounds in joys, in poetry, in virginal hopes, puerile in the eyes of men of the world, but deep because they are single-hearted.

He was endowed with the gentle and polite manners which speak to the soul, and fascinate even those who do not understand them. He was well made. His voice, coming from his heart, stirred that of others to noble sentiments, and bore witness to his true modesty by a certain ingehuousness of tone. Those who saw him felt drawn to him by that attraction of the moral nature which men of science are happily unable to analyse; they would detect in it some phenomenon of galvanism, or the current of I know not what fluid, and express our sentiments in a formula of ratios of oxygen and electricity.

These details will perhaps explain to strong-minded persons and to men of fashion why, in the absence of the porter whom he had sent to the end of the Rue de la Madeleine to call him a coach, Hippolyte Schinner did not ask the man's wife any questions concerning the two women whose kindness of heart had shown itself in his behalf. But though he replied Yes or No to the inquiries, natural under the circumstances, which the good woman made as to his accident, and the friendly intervention of the tenants occupying the fourth floor, he could not hinder her from following the instinct of her kind; she mentioned the two strangers, speaking of them as prompted by the interests of her policy and the subterranean opinions of the porter's lodge.

'Ah,' said she, 'they were, no doubt, Mademoiselle Leseigneur and her mother, who have lived here these four years. We do not yet know exactly what these ladies do; in the morning, only till the hour of noon, an old woman who is half deaf, and who never speaks any more than a wall, comes in to help them; in the evening, two or three old gentlemen, with loops of ribbon, like you, Monsieur, come to see them, and often stay very late. One of them comes in a carriage with servants, and is said to have sixty thousand francs a year. However, they are very quiet tenants, as you are, Monsieur; and economical! they live on nothing, and as soon as a letter is brought they pay for it. It is a queer thing, Monsieur, the mother's name is not the same as the daughter's. Ah, but when they go for a walk in the Tuileries Mademoiselle is very smart, and she never goes out but she is followed by a lot of young men; but she shuts the door in their face, and she is quite right. The proprietor would never allow——'

The coach having come, Hippolyte heard no more, and went home. His mother, to whom he related his adventure, dressed his wound afresh, and would not allow him to go to the studio next day. After taking advice,

various treatments were prescribed, and Hippolyte remained at home three days. During this retirement his idle fancy recalled vividly, bit by bit, the details of the scene that had ensued on his fainting fit. The young girl's profile was clearly projected against the darkness of his inward vision; he saw once more the mother's faded features, or he felt the touch of Adélaïde's hands. He remembered some gesture which at first had not greatly struck him, but whose exquisite grace was thrown into relief by memory; then an attitude, or the tones of a melodious voice, enhanced by the distance of remembrance, suddenly rose before him, as objects plunging to the bottom of deep waters come back to the surface.

So, on the day when he could resume work, he went early to his studio; but the visit he undoubtedly had a right to pay to his neighbours was the true cause of his haste; he had already forgotten the pictures he had begun. At the moment when a passion throws off its swaddling clothes, inexplicable pleasures are felt, known to those who have loved. So some readers will understand why the painter mounted the stairs to the fourth floor but slowly, and will be in the secret of the throbs that followed each other so rapidly in his heart at the moment when he saw the humble brown door of the rooms inhabited by Mademoiselle Leseigneur. This girl, whose name was not the same as her mother's, had aroused the young painter's deepest sympathies; he chose to fancy some similarity between himself and her as to their position, and attributed to her misfortunes of birth akin to his own. All the time he worked Hippolyte gave himself very willingly to thoughts of love, and made a great deal of noise to compel the two ladies to think of him, as he was thinking of them. He stayed late at the studio and dined there; then, at about seven o'clock, he went down to call on his neighbours.

No painter of manners has ventured to initiate us—

perhaps out of modesty—into the really curious privacy of certain Parisian existences, into the secret of the dwellings whence emerge such fresh and elegant toilets, such brilliant women, who, rich on the surface, allow the signs of very doubtful comfort to peep out in every part of their home. If, here, the picture is too boldly drawn, if you find it tedious in places, do not blame the description, which is, indeed, part and parcel of my story; for the appearance of the rooms inhabited by his two neighbours had a great influence on the feelings and hopes of Hippolyte Schinner.

The house belonged to one of those proprietors in whom there is a foregone and profound horror of repairs and decoration, one of the men who regard their position as Paris house-owners as a business. In the vast chain of moral species, these people hold a middle place between the miser and the usurer. Optimists in their own interests, they are all faithful to the Austrian *status quo*. If you speak of moving a cupboard or a door, of opening the most indispensable air-hole, their eyes flash, their bile rises, they rear like a frightened horse. When the wind blows down a few chimney-pots they are quite ill, and deprive themselves of an evening at the Gymnase or the Porte-Saint-Martin Theatre, 'on account of repairs.' Hippolyte, who had seen the performance gratis of a comical scene with Monsieur Molineux as concerning certain decorative repairs in his studio, was not surprised to see the dark greasy paint, the oily stains, spots, and other disagreeable accessories that varied the woodwork. And these stigmata of poverty are not altogether devoid of poetry in an artist's eyes.

Mademoiselle Leseigneur herself opened the door. On recognising the young artist she bowed, and at the same time, with Parisian adroitness, and with the presence of mind that pride can lend, she turned round to shut a door in a glass partition through which Hippolyte might have caught sight of some linen hung by lines over

patent ironing stoves, an old camp-bed, some wood-embers, charcoal, irons, a filter, the household crockery, and all the utensils familiar to a small household. Muslin curtains, fairly white, carefully screened this lumber-room—a *capharnaüm*, as the French call such a domestic laboratory,—which was lighted by windows looking out on a neighbouring yard.

Hippolyte, with the quick eye of an artist, saw the uses, the furniture, the general effect and condition of this first room, thus cut in half. The more honourable half, which served both as ante-room and dining-room, was hung with an old salmon-rose-coloured paper, with a flock border, the manufacture of Reveillon, no doubt; the holes and spots had been carefully touched over with wafers. Prints representing the battles of Alexander, by Lebrun, in frames with the gilding rubbed off, were symmetrically arranged on the walls. In the middle stood a massive mahogany table, old-fashioned in shape, and worn at the edges. A small stove, whose thin straight pipe was scarcely visible, stood in front of the chimney-place, but the hearth was occupied by a cupboard. By a strange contrast the chairs showed some remains of former splendour; they were of carved mahogany, but the red morocco seats, the gilt nails and reeded backs, showed as many scars as an old sergeant of the Imperial Guard.

This room did duty as a museum of certain objects, such as are never seen but in this kind of amphibious household; nameless objects with the stamp at once of luxury and penury. Among other curiosities Hippolyte noticed a splendidly finished telescope, hanging over the small discoloured glass that decorated the chimney. To harmonise with this strange collection of furniture there was, between the chimney and the partition, a wretched sideboard of painted wood, pretending to be mahogany, of all woods the most impossible to imitate. But the slippery red quarries, the shabby little rugs in front of

the chairs, and all the furniture, shone with the hard-rubbing cleanliness which lends a treacherous lustre to old things by making their defects, their age, and their long service still more conspicuous. An indescribable odour pervaded the room, a mingled smell of the exhalations from the lumber room, and the vapours of the dining-room, with those from the stairs, though the window was partly open. The air from the street fluttered the dusty curtains, which were carefully drawn so as to hide the window bay, where former tenants had testified to their presence by various ornamental additions—a sort of domestic fresco.

Adélaïde hastened to open the door of the inner room, where she announced the painter with evident pleasure. Hippolyte, who, of yore, had seen the same signs of poverty in his mother's home, noted them with the singular vividness of impression which characterises the earliest acquisitions of memory, and entered into the details of this existence better than any one else would have done. As he recognised the facts of his life as a child, the kind young fellow felt neither scorn for disguised misfortune nor pride in the luxury he had lately conquered for his mother.

'Well, Monsieur, I hope you no longer feel the effects of your fall,' said the old lady, rising from an antique armchair that stood by the chimney, and offering him a seat.

'No, Madame. I have come to thank you for the kind care you gave me, and above all Mademoiselle, who heard me fall.'

As he uttered this speech, stamped with the exquisite stupidity given to the mind by the first disturbing symptoms of true love, Hippolyte looked at the young girl. Adélaïde was lighting the Argand lamp, no doubt, that she might get rid of a tallow candle fixed in a large copper flat-candlestick, and graced with a heavy fluting of grease from its guttering. She answered with a slight

bow, carried the flat candlestick into the ante-room, came back, and after placing the lamp on the chimney shelf, seated herself by her mother, a little behind the painter, so as to be able to look at him at her ease, while apparently much interested in the burning of the lamp; the flame, checked by the damp in a dingy chimney, sputtered as it struggled with a charred and badly trimmed wick. Hippolyte, seeing the large mirror that decorated the chimney piece, immediately fixed his eyes on it to admire Adélaïde. Thus the girl's little stratagem only served to embarrass them both.

While talking with Madame Leseigneur, for Hippolyte called her so, on the chance of being right, he examined the room, but unobtrusively and by stealth.

The Egyptian figures on the iron fire-dogs were scarcely visible, the hearth was so heaped with cinders; two brands tried to meet in front of a sham log of fire-brick, as carefully buried as a miser's treasure could ever be. An old Aubusson carpet, very much faded, very much mended, and as worn as a pensioner's coat, did not cover the whole of the tiled floor, and the cold struck to his feet. The walls were hung with a reddish paper, imitating figured silk with a yellow pattern. In the middle of the wall opposite the windows the painter saw a crack, and the outline marked on the paper of double-doors, shutting off a recess where Madame Leseigneur slept no doubt, a fact ill disguised by a sofa in front of the door. Facing the chimney, above a mahogany chest of drawers of handsome and tasteful design, was the portrait of an officer of rank, which the dim light did not allow him to see well; but from what he could make out he thought that the fearful daub must have been painted in China. The window-curtains of red silk were as much faded as the furniture, in red and yellow worsted work, if this room 'contrived a double debt to pay.' On the marble top of the chest of drawers was a costly malachite tray, with a dozen coffee cups magnificently painted, and

made, no doubt, at Sevres. On the chimney shelf stood the omnipresent Empire clock: a warrior driving the four horses of a chariot, whose wheel bore the numbers of the hours on its spokes. The tapers in the tall candlesticks were yellow with smoke, and at each corner of the shelf stood a porcelain vase crowned with artificial flowers full of dust and stuck into moss.

In the middle of the room Hippolyte remarked a card-table ready for play, with new packs of cards. For an observer there was something heartrending in the sight of this misery painted up like an old woman who wants to falsify her face. At such a sight every man of sense must at once have stated to himself this obvious dilemma —either these two women are honesty itself, or they live by intrigue and gambling. But on looking at Adélaïde, a man so pure-minded as Schinner could not but believe in her perfect innocence, and ascribe the incoherence of the furniture to honourable causes.

'My dear,' said the old lady to the young one, 'I am cold; make a little fire, and give me my shawl.'

Adélaïde went into a room next the drawing-room, where she no doubt slept, and returned bringing her mother a cashmere shawl, which when new must have been very costly; the pattern was Indian; but it was old, faded, and full of darns, and matched the furniture. Madame Leseigneur wrapped herself in it very artistically, and with the readiness of an old woman who wishes to make her words seem truth. The young girl ran lightly off to the lumber-room and reappeared with a bundle of small wood, which she gallantly threw on the fire to revive it.

It would be rather difficult to reproduce the conversation which followed among these three persons. Hippolyte, guided by the tact which is almost always the outcome of misfortune suffered in early youth, dared not allow himself to make the least remark as to his neighbours' situation, as he saw all about him the signs of ill-

disguised poverty. The simplest question would have been an indiscretion, and could only be ventured on by old friendship. The painter was nevertheless absorbed in the thought of this concealed penury, it pained his generous soul; but knowing how offensive every kind of pity may be, even the friendliest, the disparity between his thoughts and his words made him feel uncomfortable.

The two ladies at first talked of painting, for women easily guess the secret embarrassment of a first call; they themselves feel it perhaps, and the nature of their mind supplies them with a thousand devices to put an end to it. By questioning the young man as to the material exercise of his art, and as to his studies, Adélaïde and her mother emboldened him to talk. The indefinable nothings of their chat, animated by kind feeling, naturally led Hippolyte to flash forth remarks or reflections which showed the character of his habits and of his mind. Trouble had prematurely faded the old lady's face, formerly handsome, no doubt; nothing was left but the more prominent features, the outline, in a word, the skeleton of a countenance of which the whole effect indicated great shrewdness with much grace in the play of the eyes, in which could be discerned the expression peculiar to women of the old Court; an expression that cannot be defined in words. Those fine and mobile features might quite as well indicate bad feelings, and suggest astuteness and womanly artifice carried to a high pitch of wickedness, as reveal the refined delicacy of a beautiful soul.

Indeed, the face of a woman has this element of mystery to puzzle the ordinary observer, that the difference between frankness and duplicity, the genius for intrigue and the genius of the heart, is there inscrutable. A man gifted with a penetrating eye can read the intangible shade of difference produced by a more or less curved line, a more or less deep dimple, a more or less prominent feature. The appreciation of these indications lies

entirely in the domain of intuition; this alone can lead to the discovery of what every one is interested in concealing. This old lady's face was like the room she inhabited; it seemed as difficult to detect whether this squalor covered vice or the highest virtue, as to decide whether Adélaïde's mother was an old coquette accustomed to weigh, to calculate, to sell everything, or a loving woman, full of noble feeling and amiable qualities. But at Schinner's age the first impulse of the heart is to believe in goodness. And indeed, as he studied Adélaïde's noble and almost haughty brow, as he looked into her eyes full of soul and thought, he breathed, so to speak, the sweet and modest fragrance of virtue. In the course of the conversation he seized an opportunity of discussing portraits in general, to give himself a pretext for examining the frightful *pastel*, of which the colour had flown, and the chalk in many places fallen away.

'You are attached to that picture for the sake of the likeness, no doubt, Mesdames, for the drawing is dreadful?' he said, looking at Adélaïde.

'It was done at Calcutta, in great haste,' replied the mother, in an agitated voice.

She gazed at the formless sketch with the deep absorption which memories of happiness produce when they are roused and fall on the heart like a beneficent dew to whose refreshing touch we love to yield ourselves up; but in the expression of the old lady's face there were traces too of perennial regret. At least, it was thus that the painter chose to interpret her attitude and countenance, and he presently sat down again by her side.

'Madame,' he said, 'in a very short time the colours of that pastel will have disappeared. The portrait will only survive in your memory. Where you will still see the face that is dear to you, others will see nothing at all. Will you allow me to reproduce the likeness on canvas? It will be more permanently recorded then than on that sheet of paper. Grant me, I beg, as a neighbourly favour,

the pleasure of doing you this service. There are times when an artist is glad of a respite from his greater undertakings by doing work of less lofty pretensions, so it will be a recreation for me to paint that head.'

The old lady flushed as she heard the painter's words, and Adélaïde shot one of those glances of deep feeling which seem to flash from the soul. Hippolyte wanted to feel some tie linking him with his two neighbours, to conquer a right to mingle in their life. His offer, appealing as it did to the liveliest affections of the heart, was the only one he could possibly make; it gratified his pride as an artist, and could not hurt the feelings of the ladies. Madame Leseigneur accepted, without eagerness or reluctance, but with the self-possession of a noble soul, fully aware of the character of bonds formed by such an obligation, while, at the same time, they are its highest glory as a proof of esteem.

'I fancy,' said the painter, 'that the uniform is that of a naval officer?'

'Yes,' she said, 'that of a captain in command of a vessel. Monsieur de Rouville—my husband—died at Batavia in consequence of a wound received in a fight with an English ship they fell in with off the Asiatic coast. He commanded a frigate of fifty-six guns, and the *Revenge* carried ninety-six. The struggle was very unequal, but he defended his ship so bravely that he held out till nightfall and got away. When I came back to France Bonaparte was not yet in power, and I was refused a pension. When I applied again for it, quite lately, I was sternly informed that if the Baron de Rouville had emigrated I should not have lost him; that by this time he would have been rear-admiral; finally, his Excellency quoted I know not what decree of forfeiture. I took this step, to which I was urged by my friends, only for the sake of my poor Adélaïde. I have always hated the idea of holding out my hand as a beggar in the name of a grief which deprives a woman of voice and strength. I

do not like this money valuation for blood irreparably spilt——'

'Dear mother, this subject always does you harm.'

In response to this remark from Adélaïde, the Baronne Leseigneur bowed, and was silent.

'Monsieur,' said the young girl to Hippolyte, 'I had supposed that a painter's work was generally fairly quiet?'

At this question Schinner coloured, remembering the noise he had made. Adélaïde said no more, and spared him a falsehood by rising at the sound of a carriage stopping at the door. She went into her own room, and returned carrying a pair of tall gilt candlesticks with partly burnt wax candles, which she quickly lighted, and without waiting for the bell to ring, she opened the door of the outer room, where she set the lamp down. The sound of a kiss given and received found an echo in Hippolyte's heart. The young man's impatience to see the man who treated Adélaïde with so much familiarity, was not immediately gratified; the new-comers had a conversation, which he thought very long, in an undertone, with the young girl.

At last Mademoiselle de Rouville returned, followed by two men, whose costume, countenance, and appearance are a long story.

The first, a man of about sixty, wore one of the coats invented, I believe, for Louis XVIII., then on the throne, in which the most difficult problem of the sartorial art had been solved by a tailor who ought to be immortal. That artist certainly understood the art of compromise, which was the moving genius of that period of shifting politics. Is it not a rare merit to be able to take the measure of the time? This coat, which the young men of the present day may conceive to be fabulous, was neither civil nor military, and might pass for civil or military by turns. *Fleurs-de-lis* were embroidered on the lapels of the back skirts. The gilt buttons also bore *fleurs-de-lis*; on the

shoulders a pair of straps cried out for useless epaulettes; these military appendages were there like a petition without a recommendation. This old gentleman's coat was of dark blue cloth, and the buttonhole had blossomed into many coloured ribbons. He, no doubt, always carried his hat in his hand—a three-cornered cocked hat, with a gold cord—for the snowy wings of his powdered hair showed not a trace of its pressure. He might have been taken for not more than fifty years of age, and seemed to enjoy robust health. While wearing the frank and loyal expression of the old émigrés, his countenance also hinted at the easy habits of a libertine, at the light and reckless passions of the Musketeers formerly so famous in the annals of gallantry. His gestures, his attitude, and his manner proclaimed that he had no intention of correcting himself of his royalism, of his religion, or of his love affairs.

A really fantastic figure came in behind this specimen of 'Louis XIV.'s light infantry'—a nickname given by the Bonapartists to these venerable survivors of the Monarchy. To do it justice it ought to be made the principal object in the picture, and it is but an accessory. Imagine a lean, dry man, dressed like the former, but seeming to be only his reflection, or his shadow, if you will. The coat, new on the first, on the second was old; the powder in his hair looked less white, the gold of the *fleurs-de-lis* less bright, the shoulder straps more hopeless and dog's-eared; his intellect seemed more feeble, his life nearer the fatal term than in the former. In short, he realised Rivarol's witticism on Champcenetz, 'He is the moonlight of me.' He was simply his double, a paler and poorer double, for there was between them all the difference that lies between the first and last impressions of a lithograph.

This speechless old man was a mystery to the painter, and always remained a mystery. The *Chevalier*, for he was a *Chevalier*, did not speak, nobody spoke to him. Was he a friend, a poor relation, a man who followed at the old gallant's heels as a lady companion does at an

old lady's? Did he fill a place midway between a dog, a parrot, and a friend? Had he saved his patron's fortune, or only his life? Was he the Trim to another Captain Toby? Elsewhere, as at the Baronne de Rouville's, he always piqued curiosity without satisfying it. Who, after the Restoration, could remember the attachment which, before the Revolution, had bound this man to his friend's wife, dead now these twenty years?

The leader, who appeared the least dilapidated of these wrecks, came gallantly up to Madame de Rouville, kissed her hand, and sat down by her. The other bowed and placed himself not far from his model, at a distance represented by two chairs. Adélaïde came behind the old gentleman's armchair and leaned her elbows on the back, unconsciously imitating the attitude given to Dido's sister by Guérin in his famous picture.

Though the gentleman's familiarity was that of a father, his freedom seemed at the moment to annoy the young girl.

'What, are you sulky with me?' he said.

Then he shot at Schinner one of those side-looks full of shrewdness and cunning, diplomatic looks, whose expression betrays the discreet uneasiness, the polite curiosity of well-bred people, and seems to ask, when they see a stranger, 'Is he one of us?'

'This is our neighbour,' said the old lady, pointing to Hippolyte. 'Monsieur is a celebrated painter, whose name must be known to you in spite of your indifference to the arts.'

The old man saw his friend's mischievous intent in suppressing the name, and bowed to the young man.

'Certainly,' said he. 'I heard a great deal about his pictures at the last Salon. Talent has immense privileges,' he added, observing the artist's red ribbon. 'That distinction, which we must earn at the cost of our blood and long service, you win in your youth; but all glory is of the same kindred,' he said, laying his hand on his Cross of Saint-Louis.

Hippolyte murmured a few words of acknowledgment, and was silent again, satisfied to admire with growing enthusiasm the beautiful girl's head that charmed him so much. He was soon lost in contemplation, completely forgetting the extreme misery of the dwelling. To him Adélaïde's face stood out against a luminous atmosphere. He replied briefly to the questions addressed to him, which, by good luck, he heard, thanks to a singular faculty of the soul which sometimes seems to have a double consciousness. Who has not known what it is to sit lost in sad or delicious meditation, listening to its voice within, while attending to a conversation or to reading? An admirable duality which often helps us to tolerate a bore! Hope, prolific and smiling, poured out before him a thousand visions of happiness; and he refused to consider what was going on around him. As confiding as a child, it seemed to him base to analyse a pleasure.

After a short lapse of time he perceived that the old lady and her daughter were playing cards with the old gentleman. As to the satellite, faithful to his function as a shadow, he stood behind his friend's chair watching his game, and answering the player's mute inquiries by little approving nods, repeating the questioning gestures of the other countenance.

'Du Halga, I always lose,' said the gentleman.

'You discard badly,' replied the Baronne de Rouville.

'For three months now I have never won a single game,' said he.

'Have you the aces?' asked the old lady.

'Yes, one more to mark,' said he.

'Shall I come and advise you?' said Adélaïde.

'No, no. Stay where I can see you. By Gad, it would be losing too much not to have you to look at!'

At last the game was over. The gentleman pulled out his purse, and, throwing two Louis d'or on the table, not without temper—

'Forty francs,' he exclaimed, 'the exact sum.—Deuce take it! It is eleven o'clock.'

'It is eleven o'clock,' repeated the silent figure, looking at the painter.

The young man, hearing these words rather more distinctly than all the others, thought it time to retire. Coming back to the world of ordinary ideas, he found a few commonplace remarks to make, took leave of the Baroness, her daughter, and the two strangers, and went away, wholly possessed by the first raptures of true love, without attempting to analyse the little incidents of the evening.

On the morrow the young painter felt the most ardent desire to see Adélaïde once more. If he had followed the call of his passion, he would have gone to his neighbours' door at six in the morning, when he went to his studio. However, he still was reasonable enough to wait till the afternoon. But as soon as he thought he could present himself to Madame de Rouville, he went downstairs, rang, blushing like a girl, shyly asked Mademoiselle Leseigneur, who came to let him in, to let him have the portrait of the Baron.

'But come in,' said Adelaïde, who had no doubt heard him come down from the studio.

The painter followed, bashful and out of countenance, not knowing what to say, happiness had so dulled his wit. To see Adélaïde, to hear the rustle of her skirt, after longing for a whole morning to be near her, after starting up a hundred times—'I will go down now'—and not to have gone; this was to him life so rich that such sensations, too greatly prolonged, would have worn out his spirit. The heart has the singular power of giving extraordinary value to mere nothings. What joy it is to a traveller to treasure a blade of grass, an unfamiliar leaf, if he has risked his life to pluck it! It is the same with the trifles of love.

The old lady was not in the drawing-room. When

the young girl found herself there, alone with the painter, she brought a chair to stand on, to take down the picture; but perceiving that she could not unhook it without setting her foot on the chest of drawers, she turned to Hippolyte, and said with a blush—

'I am not tall enough. Will you get it down?'

A feeling of modesty, betrayed in the expression of her face and the tones of her voice, was the real motive of her request; and the young man, understanding this, gave her one of those glances of intelligence which are the sweetest language of love. Seeing that the painter had read her soul, Adélaïde cast down her eyes with the instinct of reserve which is the secret of a maiden's heart. Hippolyte, finding nothing to say, and feeling almost timid, took down the picture, examined it gravely, carrying it to the light at the window, and then went away, without saying a word to Mademoiselle Leseigneur but, 'I will return it soon.'

During this brief moment they both went through one of those storms of agitation of which the effects in the soul may be compared to those of a stone flung into a deep lake. The most delightful waves of thought rise and follow each other, indescribable, repeated, and aimless, tossing the heart like the circular ripples, which for a long time fret the waters, starting from the point where the stone fell.

Hippolyte returned to the studio bearing the portrait. His easel was ready with a fresh canvas, and his palette set, his brushes cleaned, the spot and the light carefully chosen. And till the dinner hour he worked at the painting with the ardour artists throw into their whims. He went again that evening to the Baronne de Rouville's, and remained from nine till eleven. Excepting the different subjects of conversation, this evening was exactly like the last. The two old men arrived at the same hour, the same game of piquet was played, the same speeches made by the players, the sum lost by

Adélaïde's friend was not less considerable than on the previous evening; only Hippolyte, a little bolder, ventured to chat with the young girl.

A week passed thus, and in the course of it the painter's feelings and Adélaïde's underwent the slow and delightful transformations which bring two souls to a perfect understanding. Every day the look with which the girl welcomed her friend grew more intimate, more confiding, gayer, and more open; her voice and manner became more eager and more familiar. They laughed and talked together, telling each other their thoughts, speaking of themselves with the simplicity of two children who have made friends in a day, as much as if they had met constantly for three years. Schinner wished to be taught piquet. Being ignorant and a novice, he, of course, made blunder after blunder, and, like the old man, he lost almost every game. Without having spoken a word of love the lovers knew that they were all in all to one another. Hippolyte enjoyed exerting his power over his gentle little friend, and many concessions were made to him by Adélaïde, who, timid and devoted to him, was quite deceived by the assumed fits of temper, such as the least skilled lover and the most guileless girl can affect; and which they constantly play off, as spoilt children abuse the power they owe to their mother's affection. Thus all familiarity between the girl and the old Count was soon put a stop to. She understood the painter's melancholy, and the thoughts hidden in the furrows on his brow, from the abrupt tone of the few words he spoke when the old man unceremoniously kissed Adélaïde's hands or throat.

Mademoiselle Leseigneur, on her part, soon expected her lover to give her a short account of all his actions; she was so unhappy, so restless when Hippolyte did not come, she scolded him so effectually for his absence, that the painter had to give up seeing his other friends, and now went nowhere. Adélaïde allowed the natural jealousy of

women to be perceived when she heard that sometimes at eleven o'clock, on quitting the house, the painter still had visits to pay, and was to be seen in the most brilliant drawing-rooms of Paris. This mode of life, she assured him, was bad for his health; then, with the intense conviction to which the accent, the emphasis, and the look of one we love lend so much weight, she asserted that a man who was obliged to expend his time and the charms of his wit on several women at once could not be the object of any very warm affection. Thus the painter was led, as much by the tyranny of his passion as by the exactions of a girl in love, to live exclusively in the little apartment where everything attracted him.

And never was there a purer or more ardent love. On both sides the same trustfulness, the same delicacy, gave their passion increase without the aid of those sacrifices by which many persons try to prove their affection. Between these two there was such a constant interchange of sweet emotion that they knew not which gave or received the most.

A spontaneous affinity made the union of their souls a close one. The progress of this true feeling was so rapid that two months after the accident to which the painter owed the happiness of knowing Adélaïde, their lives were one life. From early morning the young girl, hearing footsteps overhead, could say to herself, 'He is there.' When Hippolyte went home to his mother at the dinner hour he never failed to look in on his neighbours, and in the evening he flew there at the accustomed hour with a lover's punctuality. Thus the most tyrannical woman or the most ambitious in the matter of love could not have found the smallest fault with the young painter. And Adélaïde tasted of unmixed and unbounded happiness as she saw the fullest realisation of the ideal of which, at her age, it is so natural to dream.

The old gentleman now came more rarely; Hippolyte,

who had been jealous, had taken his place at the green table, and shared his constant ill-luck at cards. And sometimes, in the midst of his happiness, as he considered Madame de Rouville's disastrous position—for he had had more than one proof of her extreme poverty—an importunate thought would haunt him. Several times he had said to himself as he went home, 'Strange! twenty francs every evening?' and he dared not confess to himself his odious suspicions.

He spent two months over the portrait, and when it was finished, varnished, and framed, he looked upon it as one of his best works. Madame la Baronne de Rouville had never spoken of it again. Was this from indifference or pride? The painter would not allow himself to account for this silence. He joyfully plotted with Adélaïde to hang the picture in its place when Madame de Rouville should be out. So one day, during the walk her mother usually took in the Tuileries, Adélaïde for the first time went up to Hippolyte's studio, on the pretext of seeing the portrait in the good light in which it had been painted. She stood speechless and motionless, but in ecstatic contemplation, in which all a woman's feelings were merged. For are they not all comprehended in boundless admiration for the man she loves? When the painter, uneasy at her silence, leaned forward to look at her, she held out her hand, unable to speak a word, but two tears fell from her eyes. Hippolyte took her hand, and covered it with kisses; for a minute they looked at each other in silence, both longing to confess their love, and not daring. The painter kept her hand in his, and the same glow, the same throb, told them that their hearts were both beating wildly. The young girl, too greatly agitated, gently drew away from Hippolyte, and said, with a look of the utmost simplicity—

'You will make my mother very happy.'

'What! only your mother?' he asked.

'Oh, I am too happy.'

The painter bent his head and remained silent, frightened at the vehemence of the feelings which her tones stirred in his heart. Then, both understanding the perils of the situation, they went downstairs and hung up the picture in its place. Hippolyte dined for the first time with the Baroness, who, greatly overcome, and drowned in tears, must needs embrace him.

In the evening the old émigré, the Baron de Rouville's old comrade, paid the ladies a visit to announce that he had just been promoted to the rank of vice-admiral. His voyages by land over Germany and Russia had been counted as naval campaigns. On seeing the portrait he cordially shook the painter's hand, and exclaimed, 'By Gad! though my old hulk does not deserve to be perpetuated, I would gladly give five hundred pistoles to see myself as like as that is to my dear old Rouville.'

At this hint the Baroness looked at her young friend and smiled, while her face lighted up with an expression of sudden gratitude. Hippolyte suspected that the old admiral wished to offer him the price of both portraits while paying for his own. His pride as an artist, no less than his jealousy perhaps, took offence at the thought, and he replied—

'Monsieur, if I were a portrait-painter I should not have done this one.'

The admiral bit his lip, and sat down to cards.

The painter remained near Adélaïde, who proposed a dozen hands of piquet, to which he agreed. As he played he observed in Madame de Rouville an excitement over her game which surprised him. Never before had the old Baroness manifested so ardent a desire to win, or so keen a joy in fingering the old gentleman's gold pieces. During the evening evil suspicions troubled Hippolyte's happiness, and filled him with distrust. Could it be that Madame de Rouville lived by gambling? Was she playing at this moment to pay off some debt, or under the pressure of necessity? Perhaps she had not paid her

rent. That old man seemed shrewd enough not to allow his money to be taken with impunity. What interest attracted him to this poverty-stricken house, he who was rich? Why, when he had formerly been so familiar with Adélaïde, had he given up the rights he had acquired, and which were perhaps his due?

These involuntary reflections prompted him to watch the old man and the Baroness, whose meaning looks and certain sidelong glances cast at Adélaïde displeased him. 'Am I being duped?' was Hippolyte's last idea—horrible, scathing, for he believed it just enough to be tortured by it. He determined to stay after the departure of the two old men, to confirm or to dissipate his suspicions. He drew out his purse to pay Adélaïde; but, carried away by his poignant thoughts, he laid it on the table, falling into a reverie of brief duration; then, ashamed of his silence, he rose, answered some commonplace question from Madame de Rouville, and went close up to her to examine the withered features while he was talking to her.

He went away, racked by a thousand doubts. He had gone down but a few steps when he turned back to fetch the forgotten purse.

'I left my purse here!' he said to the young girl.

'No,' she said, reddening.

'I thought it was there,' and he pointed to the card-table. Not finding it, in his shame for Adélaïde and the Baroness, he looked at them with a blank amazement that made them laugh, turned pale, felt his waistcoat, and said, 'I must have made a mistake. I have it somewhere no doubt.'

In one end of the purse there were fifteen Louis d'or, and in the other some small change. The theft was so flagrant, and denied with such effrontery, that Hippolyte no longer felt a doubt as to his neighbours' morals. He stood still on the stairs, and got down with some difficulty; his knees shook, he felt dizzy, he was in a cold sweat, he shivered, and found himself unable to

walk, struggling, as he was, with the agonising shock caused by the destruction of all his hopes. And at this moment he found lurking in his memory a number of observations, trifling in themselves, but which corroborated his frightful suspicions, and which, by proving the certainty of this last incident, opened his eyes as to the character and life of these two women.

Had they really waited till the portrait was given them before robbing him of his purse? In such a combination the theft was even more odious. The painter recollected that for the last two or three evenings Adélaïde, while seeming to examine with a girl's curiosity the particular stitch of the worn silk netting, was probably counting the coins in the purse, while making some light jests, quite innocent in appearance, but no doubt with the object of watching for a moment when the sum was worth stealing.

'The old admiral has perhaps good reasons for not marrying Adélaïde, and so the Baroness has tried——'

But at this hypothesis he checked himself, not finishing his thought, which was contradicted by a very just reflection, 'If the Baroness hopes to get me to marry her daughter,' thought he, 'they would not have robbed me.'

Then, clinging to his illusions, to the love that already had taken such deep root, he tried to find a justification in some accident. 'The purse must have fallen on the floor,' said he to himself, 'or I left it lying on my chair. Or perhaps I have it about me—I am so absent-minded!' He searched himself with hurried movements, but did not find the ill-starred purse. His memory cruelly retraced the fatal truth, minute by minute. He distinctly saw the purse lying on the green cloth; but then, doubtful no longer, he excused Adélaïde, telling himself that persons in misfortune should not be so hastily condemned. There was, of course, some secret behind this apparently degrading action. He would not admit that that proud and noble face was a lie.

At the same time the wretched rooms rose before him, denuded of the poetry of love which beautifies everything; he saw them dirty and faded, regarding them as emblematic of an inner life devoid of honour, idle and vicious. Are not our feelings written, as it were, on the things about us?

Next morning he rose, not having slept. The heart-ache, that terrible malady of the soul, had made rapid inroads. To lose the bliss we dreamed of, to renounce our whole future, is a keener pang than that caused by the loss of known happiness, however complete it may have been; for is not Hope better than Memory? The thoughts into which our spirit is suddenly plunged are like a shoreless sea, in which we may swim for a moment, but where our love is doomed to drown and die. And it is a frightful death. Are not our feelings the most glorious part of our life? It is this partial death which, in certain delicate or powerful natures, leads to the terrible ruin produced by disenchantment, by hopes and passions betrayed. Thus it was with the young painter. He went out at a very early hour to walk under the fresh shade of the Tuileries, absorbed in his thoughts, forgetting everything in the world.

There by chance he met one of his most intimate friends, a school-fellow and studio-mate, with whom he had lived on better terms than with a brother.

'Why, Hippolyte, what ails you?' asked François Souchet, the young sculptor who had just won the first prize, and was soon to set out for Italy.

'I am most unhappy,' replied Hippolyte gravely.

'Nothing but a love affair can cause you grief. Money, glory, respect—you lack nothing.'

Insensibly the painter was led into confidences, and confessed his love. The moment he mentioned the Rue de Suresne, and a young girl living on the fourth floor, 'Stop, stop,' cried Souchet lightly. 'A little girl I see every morning at the Church of the Assumption, and

with whom I have a flirtation. But, my dear fellow, we all know her. The mother is a Baroness. Do you really believe in a Baroness living up four flights of stairs? Brrr! Why, you are a relic of the golden age! We see the old mother here, in this avenue, every day; why, her face, her appearance, tell everything. What, have you not known her for what she is by the way she holds her bag?'

The two friends walked up and down for some time, and several young men who knew Souchet or Schinner joined them. The painter's adventure, which the sculptor regarded as unimportant, was repeated by him.

'So he, too, has seen that young lady!' said Souchet.

And then there were comments, laughter, innocent mockery, full of the liveliness familiar to artists, but which pained Hippolyte frightfully. A certain native reticence made him uncomfortable as he saw his heart's secret so carelessly handled, his passion rent, torn to tatters, a young and unknown girl, whose life seemed to be so modest, the victim of condemnation, right or wrong, but pronounced with such reckless indifference. He pretended to be moved by a spirit of contradiction, asking each for proofs of his assertions, and their jests began again.

'But, my dear boy, have you seen the Baroness's shawl?' asked Souchet.

'Have you ever followed the girl when she patters off to church in the morning?' said Joseph Bridau, a young dauber in Gros' studio.

'Oh, the mother has among other virtues a certain grey gown, which I regard as typical,' said Bixiou, the caricaturist.

'Listen, Hippolyte,' the sculptor went on. 'Come here at about four o'clock, and just study the walk of both mother and daughter. If after that you still have doubts! well, no one can ever make anything of you; you would be capable of marrying your porter's daughter.'

Torn by the most conflicting feelings, the painter parted from his friends. It seemed to him that Adélaïde and her mother must be superior to these accusations, and at the bottom of his heart he was filled with remorse for having suspected the purity of this beautiful and simple girl. He went to his studio, passing the door of the rooms where Adélaïde was, and conscious of a pain at his heart which no man can misapprehend. He loved Mademoiselle de Rouville so passionately that, in spite of the theft of the purse, he still worshipped her. His love was that of the Chevalier des Grieux admiring his mistress, and holding her as pure, even on the cart which carries such lost creatures to prison. 'Why should not my love keep her the purest of women? Why abandon her to evil and to vice without holding out a rescuing hand to her?'

The idea of this mission pleased him. Love makes a gain of everything. Nothing tempts a young man more than to play the part of a good genius to a woman. There is something inexplicably romantic in such an enterprise which appeals to a highly strung soul. Is it not the utmost stretch of devotion under the loftiest and most engaging aspect? Is there not something grand in the thought that we love enough still to love on when the love of others dwindles and dies?

Hippolyte sat down in his studio, gazed at his picture without doing anything to it, seeing the figures through tears that swelled in his eyes, holding his brush in his hand, going up to the canvas as if to soften down an effect, but not touching it. Night fell, and he was still in this attitude. Roused from his moodiness by the darkness, he went downstairs, met the old admiral on the way, looked darkly at him as he bowed, and fled.

He had intended going in to see the ladies, but the sight of Adélaïde's protector froze his heart and dispelled his purpose. For the hundredth time he wondered what interest could bring this old prodigal, with his

eighty thousand francs a year, to this fourth story, where he lost about forty francs every evening; and he thought he could guess what it was.

The next and following days Hippolyte threw himself into his work, to try to conquer his passion by the swift rush of ideas and the ardour of composition. He half succeeded. Study consoled him, though it could not smother the memories of so many tender hours spent with Adélaïde.

One evening, as he left his studio, he saw the door of the ladies' rooms half open. Somebody was standing in the recess of the window, and the position of the door and the staircase made it impossible that the painter should pass without seeing Adélaïde. He bowed coldly, with a glance of supreme indifference; but judging of the girl's suffering by his own, he felt an inward shudder as he reflected on the bitterness which that look and that coldness must produce in a loving heart. To crown the most delightful feast which ever brought joy to two pure souls, by eight days of disdain, of the deepest and most utter contempt!—A frightful conclusion. And perhaps the purse had been found, perhaps Adélaïde had looked for her friend every evening.

This simple and natural idea filled the lover with fresh remorse; he asked himself whether the proofs of attachment given him by the young girl, the delightful talks, full of the love that had so charmed him, did not deserve at least an inquiry; were not worthy of some justification. Ashamed of having resisted the promptings of his heart for a whole week, and feeling himself almost a criminal in this mental struggle, he called the same evening on Madame de Rouville.

All his suspicions, all his evil thoughts vanished at the sight of the young girl, who had grown pale and thin.

'Good heavens! what is the matter?' he asked her, after greeting the Baroness.

Adélaïde made no reply, but she gave him a look

of deep melancholy, a sad, dejected look, which pained him.

'You have, no doubt, been working hard,' said the old lady. 'You are altered. We are the cause of your seclusion. That portrait had delayed some pictures essential to your reputation.'

Hippolyte was glad to find so good an excuse for his rudeness.

'Yes,' he said, 'I have been very busy, but I have been suffering——'

At these words Adélaïde raised her head, looked at her lover, and her anxious eyes had now no hint of reproach.

'You must have thought us quite indifferent to any good or ill that may befall you?' said the old lady.

'I was wrong,' he replied. 'Still, there are forms of pain which we know not how to confide to any one, even to a friendship of older date than that with which you honour me.'

'The sincerity and strength of friendship are not to be measured by time. I have seen old friends who had not a tear to bestow on misfortune,' said the Baroness, nodding sadly.

'But you—what ails you?' the young man asked Adélaïde.

'Oh, nothing,' replied the Baroness, 'Adélaïde has sat up late for some nights to finish some little piece of woman's work, and would not listen to me when I told her that a day more or less did not matter——'

Hippolyte was not listening. As he looked at these two noble, calm faces, he blushed for his suspicions, and ascribed the loss of his purse to some unknown accident.

This was a delicious evening to him, and perhaps to her too. There are some secrets which young souls understand so well. Adélaïde could read Hippolyte's thoughts. Though he could not confess his misdeeds, the painter knew them, and he had come back to his mistress more in love, and more affectionate, trying thus to

purchase her tacit forgiveness. Adélaïde was enjoying such perfect, such sweet happiness, that she did not think she had paid too dear for it with all the grief that had so cruelly crushed her soul. And yet, this true concord of hearts, this understanding so full of magic charm, was disturbed by a little speech of Madame de Rouville's.

'Let us have our little game,' she said, 'for my old friend Kergarouët will not let me off.'

These words revived all the young painter's fears; he coloured as he looked at Adélaïde's mother, but he saw nothing in her countenance but the expression of the frankest good-nature; no double meaning marred its charm; its keenness was not perfidious, its humour seemed kindly, and no trace of remorse disturbed its equanimity.

He sat down to the card-table. Adélaïde took side with the painter, saying that he did not know piquet, and needed a partner.

All through the game Madame de Rouville and her daughter exchanged looks of intelligence, which alarmed Hippolyte all the more because he was winning; but at last a final hand left the lovers in the old lady's debt.

To feel for some money in his pocket the painter took his hands off the table, and he then saw before him a purse which Adélaïde had slipped in front of him without his noticing it; the poor child had the old one in her hand, and, to keep her countenance, was looking into it for the money to pay her mother. The blood rushed to Hippolyte's heart with such force that he was near fainting.

The new purse, substituted for his own, and which contained his fifteen gold louis, was worked with gilt beads. The rings and tassels bore witness to Adélaïde's good taste, and she had no doubt spent all her little hoard in ornamenting this pretty piece of work. It was impossible to say with greater delicacy that the painter's gift could only be repaid by some proof of affection.

Hippolyte, overcome with happiness, turned to look at Adélaïde and her mother, and saw that they were tremulous with pleasure and delight at their little trick. He felt himself mean, sordid, a fool; he longed to punish himself, to rend his heart. A few tears rose to his eyes, by an irresistible impulse he sprang up, clasped Adélaïde in his arms, pressed her to his heart, and stole a kiss; then with the simple heartiness of an artist, 'I ask her for my wife!' he exclaimed, looking at the Baroness.

Adélaïde looked at him with half-wrathful eyes, and Madame de Rouville, somewhat astonished, was considering her reply, when the scene was interrupted by a ring at the bell. The old vice-admiral came in, followed by his shadow, and Madame Schinner. Having guessed the cause of the grief her son vainly endeavoured to conceal, Hippolyte's mother had made inquiries among her friends concerning Adélaïde. Very justly alarmed by the calumnies which weighed on the young girl, unknown to the Comte de Kergarouët, whose name she learnt from the porter's wife, she went to report them to the vice-admiral; and he, in his rage, declared 'he would crop all the scoundrels' ears for them.'

Then, prompted by his wrath, he went on to explain to Madame Schinner the secret of his losing intentionally at cards, because the Baronne's pride left him none but these ingenious means of assisting her.

When Madame Schinner had paid her respects to Madame de Rouville, the Baroness looked at the Comte de Kergarouët, at the Chevalier du Halga—the friend of the departed Comtesse de Kergarouët—at Hippolyte and Adélaïde, and said, with the grace that comes from the heart, 'So we are a family party this evening.'

Paris, *May* 1832.

THE VENDETTA

Dedicated to Puttinati, Sculptor at Milan.

In the year 1800, towards the end of October, a stranger, having with him a woman and a little girl, made his appearance in front of the Tuileries Palace, and stood for some little time close to the ruins of a house, then recently pulled down, on the spot where the wing is still unfinished which was intended to join Catherine de Medici's Palace to the Louvre built by the Valois. There he stood, his arms folded, his head bent, raising it now and again to look at the Consul's Palace, or at his wife, who sat on a stone by his side.

Though the stranger seemed to think only of the little girl of nine or ten, whose black hair was a plaything in his fingers, the woman lost none of the glances shot at her by her companion. A common feeling, other than love, united these two beings, and a common thought animated their thoughts and their actions. Misery is perhaps the strongest of all bonds.

The man had one of those broad, solemn-looking heads, with a mass of hair, of which so many examples have been perpetuated by the Carracci. Among the thick black locks were many white hairs. His features, though fine and proud, had a set hardness which spoiled them. In spite of his powerful and upright frame, he seemed to be more than sixty years of age. His clothes, which were dilapidated, betrayed his foreign origin.

The woman's face, formerly handsome, but now faded,

bore a stamp of deep melancholy, though, when her husband looked at her, she forced herself to smile, and affected a calm expression. The little girl was standing, in spite of the fatigue that was written on her small sunburnt face. She had Italian features, large black eyes under well-arched eyebrows, a native dignity and genuine grace. More than one passer-by was touched by the mere sight of this group, for the persons composing it made no effort to disguise a despair evidently as deep as the expression of it was simple; but the spring of the transient kindliness which distinguishes the Parisian is quickly dried up. As soon as the stranger perceived that he was the object of some idler's attention, he stared at him so fiercely that the most intrepid lounger hastened his step, as though he had trodden on a viper.

After remaining there a long time undecided, the tall man suddenly passed his hand across his brow, driving away, so to speak, the thoughts that had furrowed it with wrinkles, and made up his mind no doubt to some desperate determination. Casting a piercing look at his wife and daughter, he drew out of his jerkin a long dagger, held it out to the woman, and said in Italian, 'I am going to see whether the Bonapartes remember us.'

He walked on, with a slow, confident step, towards the entrance to the palace, where, of course, he was checked by a soldier on guard, with whom there could be no long discussion. Seeing that the stranger was obstinate, the sentry pointed his bayonet at him by way of *ultimatum*. As chance would have it at this moment, a squad came round to relieve guard, and the corporal very civilly informed the stranger where he might find the captain of the guard.

'Let Bonaparte know that Bartolomeo di Piombo wants to see him,' said the Italian to the officer.

In vain did the Captain explain to Bartolomeo that it was not possible to see the First Consul without having written to him beforehand to request an audience. The

stranger insisted that the officer should go to inform Bonaparte. The Captain urged the rules of his duty, and formally refused to yield to the demands of this strange petitioner. Bartolomeo knit his brows, looked at the Captain with a terrible scowl, and seemed to make him responsible for all the disasters his refusal might occasion; then he remained silent, his arms tightly crossed on his breast, and took his stand under the archway which connects the garden and the courtyard of the Tuileries.

People who are thoroughly bent on anything are almost always well served by chance. At the moment when Bartolomeo sat down on one of the kerb stones near the entrance to the palace, a carriage drove up, and out of it stepped Lucien Bonaparte, at that time Minister of the Interior.

'Ah! Loucien, good luck for me to have met you!' cried the stranger.

These words, spoken in the Corsican dialect, made Lucien stop at the instant when he was rushing into the vestibule; he looked at his fellow-countryman, and recognised him. At the first word that Bartolomeo said in his ear, he took him with him. Murat, Lannes, and Rapp were in the First Consul's Cabinet. On seeing Lucien come in with so strange a figure as was Piombo, the conversation ceased. Lucien took his brother's hand and led him into a window recess. After exchanging a few words, the First Consul raised his hand with a gesture, which Murat and Lannes obeyed by retiring. Rapp affected not to have seen it, and remained. Then, Bonaparte having sharply called him to order, the aide-de-camp went out with a sour face. The First Consul, who heard the sound of Rapp's steps in the neighbouring room, hastily followed him, and saw him close to the wall between the cabinet and the anteroom.

'You refuse to understand me?' said the First Consul-'I wish to be alone with my countryman.'

'A Corsican!' retorted the aide-de-camp. 'I distrust those creatures too much not to——'

The First Consul could not help smiling, and lightly pushed his faithful officer by the shoulders.

'Well, and what are you doing here, my poor Bartolomeo?' said the First Consul to Piombo.

'I have come to ask for shelter and protection, if you are a true Corsican,' replied Bartolomeo in a rough tone.

'What misfortune has driven you from your native land? You were the richest, the most——'

'I have killed all the Porta,' replied the Corsican, in a hollow voice, with a frown.

The First Consul drew back a step or two, like a man astonished.

'Are you going to betray me?' cried Bartolomeo, with a gloomy look at Bonaparte. 'Do you forget that there are still four of the Piombo in Corsica?'

Lucien took his fellow-countryman by the arm and shook him.

'Do you come here to threaten the saviour of France? he said vehemently.

Bonaparte made a sign to Lucien, who was silent. Then he looked at Piombo, and said, 'And why did you kill all the Porta?'

'We had made friends,' he replied; 'the Barbanti had reconciled us. The day after we had drunk together to drown our quarrel I left, because I had business at Bastia. They stayed at my place, and set fire to my vineyard at Longone. They killed my son Gregorio; my daughter Ginevra and my wife escaped; they had taken the Communion that morning; the Virgin protected them. When I got home I could no longer see my house; I searched for it with my feet in the ashes. Suddenly I came across Gregorio's body; I recognised it in the moonlight. "Oh, the Porta have played this trick!" said I to myself. I went off at once into the scrub; I got together a few men to

whom I had done some service—do you hear, Bonaparte?—and we marched down on the Porta's vineyard. We arrived at five in the morning, and by seven they were all in the presence of God. Giacomo declares that Elisa Vanni saved a child, little Luigi; but I tied him into bed with my own hands before setting the house on fire. Then I quitted the island with my wife and daughter without being able to make sure whether Luigi Porta were still alive.'

Bonaparte looked at Bartolomeo with curiosity, but no astonishment.

'How many were they?' asked Lucien.

'Seven,' replied Piombo. 'They persecuted you in their day,' he added. The words aroused no sign of hatred in the two brothers. 'Ah! you are no longer Corsicans!' cried Bartolomeo, with a sort of despair. 'Good-bye. Formerly I protected you,' he went on reproachfully. 'But for me your mother would never have reached Marseilles,' he said, turning to Bonaparte, who stood thoughtful, his elbow resting on the chimney-piece.

'I cannot in conscience take you under my wing, Piombo,' replied Napoleon. 'I am the head of a great nation; I govern the Republic; I must see that the laws are carried out.'

'Ah, ha!' said Bartolomeo.

'But I can shut my eyes,' Bonaparte went on. 'The tradition of the Vendetta will hinder the reign of law in Corsica for a long time yet,' he added, talking to himself. 'But it must be stamped out at any cost.'

He was silent for a minute, and Lucien signed to Piombo to say nothing. The Corsican shook his head from side to side with a disapproving look.

'Remain here,' the First Consul said, addressing Bartolomeo. 'We know nothing. I will see that your estates are purchased so as to give you at once the means of living. Then later, some time hence, we will

remember you. But no more Vendetta. There is no Maquis scrub here. If you play tricks with your dagger, there is no hope for you. Here the law protects everybody, and we do not do justice on our own account.'

'He has put himself at the head of a strange people,' replied Bartolomeo, taking Lucien's hand and pressing it. 'But you recognise me in misfortune; it is a bond between us for life and death; and you may command every one named Piombo.' As he spoke, his brow cleared, and he looked about him approvingly.

'You are not badly off here,' he said, with a smile, as if he would like to lodge there. 'And you are dressed all in red like a Cardinal.'

'It rests with you to rise and have a palace in Paris,' said Bonaparte, looking at him from head to foot. 'It will often happen that I may look about me for a devoted friend to whom I can trust myself.'

A sigh of gladness broke from Piombo's deep chest; he held out his hand to the First Consul, saying, 'There is something of the Corsican in you still!'

Bonaparte smiled. He gazed in silence at this man, who had brought him as it were a breath of air from his native land, from the island where he had formerly been so miraculously saved from the hatred of the 'English party,' and which he was fated never to see again. He made a sign to his brother, who led away Bartolomeo di Piombo.

Lucien inquired with interest as to the pecuniary position of the man who had once protected his family. Piombo led the Minister of the Interior to a window and showed him his wife and Ginevra, both seated on a heap of stones.

'We have come from Fontainebleau on foot,' said he, 'and we have not a sou.'

Lucien gave his fellow-countryman his purse, and desired him to come again next morning to consult as to the means of providing for his family. The income from

all Piombo's possessions in Corsica could hardly suffice to maintain him respectably in Paris.

Fifteen years elapsed between the arrival of the Piombo family in Paris and the following incidents, which, without the story of this event, would have been less intelligible.

Servin, one of our most distinguished artists, was the first to conceive the idea of opening a studio for young ladies who may wish to take lessons in painting. He was a man of over forty, of blameless habits, and wholly given up to his art; and he had married for love the daughter of a General without any fortune. At first mothers brought their daughters themselves to the professor's studio; but when they understood his high principles and appreciated the care by which he strove to deserve such confidence, they ended by sending the girls alone. It was part of the painter's scheme to take as pupils only young ladies of rich or highly respectable family, that no difficulties might arise as to the society in his studio; he had even refused to take young girls who intended to become artists, and who must necessarily have had certain kinds of training without which no mastery is possible. By degrees his prudence, the superior method by which he initiated his pupils into the secrets of his art, as well as the security their mothers felt in knowing that their daughters were in the company of well-bred girls, and in the artist's character, manners, and marriage, won him a high reputation in the world of fashion. As soon as a young girl showed any desire to learn drawing or painting, and her mother asked advice, 'Send her to Servin,' was always the answer.

Thus Servin had a specialty for teaching ladies art, as Herbault had for bonnets, Leroy for dresses, and Chevet for dainties. It was acknowledged that a young woman who had taken lessons of Servin could pronounce definitively on the pictures in the Louvre, paint a portrait

in a superior manner, copy an old picture, and produce her own painting of genre. Thus this artist sufficed for all the requirements of the aristocracy.

Notwithstanding his connection with all the best houses in Paris, he was independent and patriotic, preserving with all alike the light and witty tone, sometimes ironical, and the freedom of opinion which characterise painters.

He had carried his scrupulous precautions into the arrangement of the place where his scholars worked. The outer entrance to the loft above his dwelling-rooms had been walled up; to get into this retreat, as sacred as a harem, the way was up a staircase in the centre of the house. This studio, which occupied the whole of the top story, was on the vast scale which always surprises inquisitive visitors when, having climbed to sixty feet above the ground, they expect to find an artist lodged in the gutter. It was a kind of gallery, abundantly lighted by immense skylights screened with the large green blinds which artists use to distribute the light. A quantity of caricatures, heads sketched in outline with a brush or the point of a palette knife, all over the dark grey walls, proved that, allowing for a difference in the expression, fine young ladies have as much whimsicality in their brain as men can have. A small stove, with a huge pipe that made amazing zigzags before reaching the upper region of the roof, was the inevitable decoration of this studio. There was a shelf all round the room, supporting plaster casts which lay there in confusion, most of them under a coating of whitish dust.

Above this shelf here and there a head of Niobe hanging to a nail showed its pathetic bend, a Venus smiled, a hand was unexpectedly thrust out before your eyes, like a beggar's asking alms; then there were anatomical *écorchés*, yellow with smoke, and looking like limbs snatched from coffins; and pictures, drawings, lay-figures, frames without canvas, and canvasses without

frames, completed the effect, giving the room the characteristic aspect of a studio, a singular mixture of ornamentation and bareness, of poverty and splendour, of care and neglect.

This huge sort of hold, in which everything, even man, looks small, has a behind-the-scenes flavour; here are to be seen old linen, gilt armour, odds and ends of stuffs, and some machinery. But there is something about it as grand as thought: genius and death are there; Diana and Apollo side by side with a skull or a skeleton; beauty and disorder, poetry and reality, gorgeous colouring in shadow, and often a whole drama, but motionless and silent. How symbolical of the artist brain!

At the moment when my story begins the bright sun of July lighted up the studio, and two beams of sunshine shot across its depths, broad bands of diaphanous gold in which the dust-motes glistened. A dozen easels raised their pointed spars, looking like the masts of vessels in a harbour. Several young girls gave life to the scene by the variety of their countenances and attitudes, and the difference in their dress. The strong shadows cast by the green baize blinds, arranged to suit the position of each easel, produced a multitude of contrasts and fascinating effects of chiaroscuro.

This group of girls formed the most attractive picture in the gallery. A fair-haired girl, simply dressed, stood at some distance from her companions, working perseveringly and seeming to foresee misfortune; no one looked at her nor spoke to her; she was the prettiest, the most modest, and the least rich. Two principal groups, divided by a little space, represented two classes of society, two spirits, even in this studio, where rank and fortune ought to have been forgotten.

These young things, sitting or standing, surrounded by their paint-boxes, playing with their brushes or getting them ready, handling their bright-tinted palettes, painting, chattering, laughing, singing, given up to their natural

impulses and revealing their true characters, made up a drama unknown to men; this one proud, haughty, capricious, with black hair and beautiful hands, flashed the fire of her eyes at random; that one, light-hearted and heedless, a smile on her lips, her hair chestnut, with delicate white hands, virginal and French, a light nature without a thought of evil, living from hour to hour; another, dreamy, melancholy, pale, her head drooping like a falling blossom; her neighbour, on the contrary, tall, indolent, with Oriental manners, and long, black, melting eyes, speaking little, but lost in thought, and stealing a look at the head of Antinous.

In the midst, like the *Jocoso* of a Spanish comedy, a girl, full of wit and sparkling sallies, stood watching them all with a single glance, and making them laugh; raising a face so full of life that it could not but be pretty. She was the leader of the first group of pupils, consisting of the daughters of bankers, lawyers, and merchants—all rich, but exposed to all the minute but stinging disdains freely poured out upon them by the other young girls who belonged to the aristocracy. These were governed by the daughter of a gentleman usher to the King's private chamber, a vain little thing, as silly as she was vain, and proud of her father's having an office at Court. She aimed at seeming to understand the master's remarks at the first word, and appearing to work by inspired grace; she used an eyeglass, came very much dressed, very late, and begged her companions not to talk loud. Among this second group might be observed some exquisite shapes and distinguished-looking faces; but their looks expressed but little simplicity. Though their attitudes were elegant and their movements graceful, their faces were lacking in candour, and it was easy to perceive that they belonged to a world where politeness forms the character at an early age, and the abuse of social pleasures kills the feelings and develops selfishness. When the whole party of girl students was complete there were to be

seen among them child-like heads, virgin heads of enchanting purity, faces where the parted lips showed virgin teeth, and where a virgin smile came and went. Then the studio suggested not a seraglio, but a group of angels sitting on a cloud in heaven.

It was near noon; Servin had not yet made his appearance. For some days past he had spent most of his time at a studio he had elsewhere, finishing a picture he had there for the exhibition. Suddenly Mademoiselle Amélie Thirion, the head of the aristocrats in this little assembly, spoke at some length to her neighbour; there was profound silence among the patrician group; the banker faction were equally silent from astonishment, and tried to guess the subject of such a conference. But the secret of the young *ultras* was soon known. Amélie rose, took an easel that stood near her, and moved it to some distance from the 'nobility,' close to a clumsy partition which divided the studio from a dark closet where broken casts were kept, paintings that the professor had condemned, and, in winter, the firewood. Amélie's proceedings gave rise to a murmur of surprise which did not hinder her from completing the removal by wheeling up to the easel a stool and paint-box, in fact, everything, even a picture by Prudhon, of which a pupil, who had not yet come, was making a copy. After this *coup d'état* the party of the right painted on in silence; but the left talked it over at great length.

'What will Mademoiselle Piombo say?' asked one of the girls of Mademoiselle Mathilde Roguin, the oracle of mischief of her group.

'She is not a girl to say much,' was the reply. 'But fifty years hence she will remember this insult as if she had experienced it the day before, and will find some cruel means of revenge. She is a person I should not like to be at war with.'

'The proscription to which those ladies have condemned her is all the more unjust,' said another young

girl, 'because Mademoiselle Ginevra was very sad the day before yesterday; her father, they say, has just given up his appointment. This will add to her troubles, while she was very good to those young ladies during the Hundred Days. Did she ever say a word that could hurt them? On the contrary, she avoided talking politics. But our *ultras* seem to be prompted by jealousy rather than by party-spirit.'

'I have a great mind to fetch Mademoiselle Piombo's easel and place it by mine,' said Mathilde Roguin. She rose, but on second thoughts she sat down again. 'With a spirit like Mademoiselle Ginevra's,' said she, 'it is impossible to know how she would take our civility. Let us wait and see.'

'*Eccola!*' said the black-eyed girl languidly. In fact, the sound of footsteps coming upstairs was heard in the studio. The words, 'Here she comes!' passed from mouth to mouth, and then perfect silence fell.

To understand the full importance of the ostracism carried into effect by Amélie Thirion, it must be told that this scene took place towards the end of the month of July 1815. The second restoration of the Bourbons broke up many friendships which had weathered the turmoil of the first. At this time families, almost always divided among themselves, renewed many of the most deplorable scenes which tarnish the history of all countries at periods of civil or religious struggles. Children, young girls, old men, had caught the monarchical fever from which the Government was suffering. Discord flew in under the domestic roof, and suspicion dyed in gloomy hues the most intimate conversations and actions.

Ginevra di Piombo idolised Napoleon; indeed, how could she have hated him? The Emperor was her fellow-countryman, and her father's benefactor. Baron di Piombo was one of Napoleon's followers who had most efficiently worked to bring him back from Elba. Incap-

able of renouncing his political faith, nay, eager to proclaim it, Piombo had remained in Paris in the midst of enemies. Hence Ginevra di Piombo was ranked with the 'suspicious characters,' all the more so because she made no secret of the regret her family felt at the second restoration. The only tears she had perhaps ever shed in her life were wrung from her by the twofold tidings of Bonaparte's surrender on board the *Bellerophon*, and the arrest of Labédoyère.

The young ladies forming the aristocratic party in the studio belonged to the most enthusiastically Royalist families of Paris. It would be difficult to give any idea of the exaggerated feelings of the time, and of the horror felt towards Bonapartists. However mean and trivial Amélie Thirion's conduct may seem to-day, it was then a very natural demonstration of hatred. Ginevra di Piombo, one of Servin's earliest pupils, had occupied the place of which they wished to deprive her ever since the first day she had come to the studio. The aristocratic group had gradually settled round her; and to turn her out of a place, which in a certain sense belonged to her, was not merely to insult her, but to cause her some pain, for all artists have a predilection for the spot where they work.

However, political hostility had perhaps not much to do with the conduct of this little studio party of the Right. Ginevra di Piombo, the most accomplished of Servin's pupils, was an object of the deepest jealousy. The master professed an equal admiration for the talents and the character of this favourite pupil, who served as the standard of all his comparisons; and indeed, while it was impossible to explain the ascendancy this young girl exercised over all who were about her, she enjoyed in this small world an influence resembling that of Bonaparte over his soldiers. The aristocratic clique had, some days since, resolved on the overthrow of this queen; but as no one had been bold enough to repulse the

Bonapartist, Mademoiselle Thirion had just struck the decisive blow so as to make her companions the accomplices of her hatred. Though Ginevra was really beloved by some of the Royalist party, who at home were abundantly lectured on politics, with the tact peculiar to women, they judged it best not to interfere in the quarrel.

On entering, Ginevra was received in perfect silence. Of all the girls who had yet appeared at Servin's studio, she was the handsomest, the tallest, and the most finely made. Her gait had a stamp of dignity and grace which commanded respect. Her face, full of intelligence, seemed radiant, it was so transfused with the animation peculiar to Corsicans, which does not exclude calmness. Her abundant hair, her eyes, and their black lashes told of passion. Though the corners of her mouth were softly drawn and her lips a little too thick, they had the kindly expression which strong people derive from the consciousness of strength. By a singular freak of nature the charm of her features was in some sort belied by a marble forehead stamped with an almost savage pride, and the traditional habits of Corsica. That was the only bond between her and her native land; in every other detail of her person the simplicity and freedom of Lombard beauties were so bewitching, that only in her absence could any one bear to cause her the smallest pain. She was, indeed, so attractive, that her old father, out of prudence, never allowed her to walk alone to the studio.

The only fault of this really poetic creature came of the very power of such fully developed beauty. She had refused to marry, out of affection for her father and mother, feeling herself necessary to them in their old age. Her taste for painting had taken the place of the passions which commonly agitate women.

'You are all very silent to-day,' she said, after coming forward a step or two. 'Good morning, my little Laure,'

she added in a gentle, caressing tone, as she went up to the young girl who was painting apart from the rest. 'That head is very good. The flesh is a little too pink, but it is all capitally drawn.'

Laure raised her head, looked at Ginevra much touched, and their faces brightened with an expression of mutual affection. A faint smile gave life to the Italian's lips, but she seemed pensive, and went slowly to her place, carelessly glancing at the drawings and pictures, and saying good morning to each of the girls of the first group, without observing the unusual curiosity excited by her presence. She might have been a queen amid her Court. She did not observe the deep silence that reigned among the aristocrats, and passed their camp without saying a word. Her absence of mind was so complete that she went to her easel, opened her paint-box, took out her brushes, slipped on her brown linen cuffs, tied her apron, examined her palette, all without thinking, as it seemed, of what she was doing. All the heads of the humbler group were turned to look at her. And if the young ladies of the Thirion faction were less frankly impatient than their companions, their side glances were nevertheless directed to Ginevra.

'She notices nothing,' said Mademoiselle Roguin.

At this moment Ginevra, roused from the meditative attitude in which she had gazed at her canvas, turned her head towards the aristocratic party. With one glance she measured the distance that lay between them, and held her peace.

'It has not occurred to her that they meant to insult her,' said Mathilde. 'She has neither coloured nor turned pale. How provoked those young ladies will be if she likes her new place better than the old one!'—'You are quite apart there, Mademoiselle,' she added louder, and addressing Ginevra.

The Italian girl affected not to hear, or perhaps she did not hear; she hastily rose, walked rather slowly along the

partition which divided the dark closet from the studio, seeming to examine the skylight from which the light fell; and to this she ascribed so much importance that she got upon a chair to fasten the green baize which interfered with the light, a good deal higher. At this elevation she was on a level with a small crack in the boarding, the real object of her efforts, for the look she cast through it can only be compared with that of a miser discovering Aladdin's treasure. She quickly descended, came back to her place, arranged her picture, affected still to be dissatisfied with the light, pushed a table close to the partition, and placed a chair on it; then she nimbly mounted this scaffolding, and again peeped through the crack. She gave but one look into the closet, which was lighted by a window at the top of the partition, but what she saw impressed her so vividly that she started.

'You will fall, Mademoiselle Ginevra!' cried Laure.

All the girls turned to look at their imprudent companion, who was tottering. The fear of seeing them gather round her gave her courage; she recovered her strength and her balance, and dancing on the chair, she turned to Laure, and said with some agitation—

'Bah! It is at any rate safer than a throne!'

She quickly arranged the baize, came down, pushed the table and the chair far from the partition, returned to her easel, and made a few more attempts, seeming to try for an effect of light that suited her. Her picture did not really trouble her at all; her aim was to get close to the dark closet by which she placed herself, as she wished, at the end near the door. Then she prepared to set her palette, still in perfect silence. Where she now was she soon heard more distinctly a slight noise which, on the day before, had greatly stirred her curiosity, and sent her young imagination wandering over a wide field of conjecture. She easily recognised it as the deep, regular breathing of the sleeping man whom she had just now seen. Her curiosity was satisfied, but she found herself

burthened with an immense responsibility. Through the crack she had caught sight of the Imperial eagle, and on a camp bed, in the dim light, had seen the figure of an officer of the guard. She guessed it all. Servin was sheltering a refugee.

She now trembled lest one of her companions should come to examine her picture, and should hear the unfortunate man breathe, or heave too deep a sigh, such as had fallen on her ear during yesterday's lesson. She resolved to remain near the door, and trust to her wits to cheat the tricks of fate.

'I had better remain here,' thought she, 'to prevent some disaster, than leave the poor prisoner at the mercy of some giddy prank.'

This was the secret of Ginevra's apparent indifference when she found her easel transplanted; she was secretly delighted, since she had been able to satisfy her curiosity in a natural manner; and besides, she was too much absorbed at this moment to inquire into the reason of her exclusion. Nothing is more mortifying to young girls, or indeed to any one, than to see a practical joke, an insult, or a witticism fail of its effect in consequence of the victim's contempt. It would seem that our hatred of an enemy is increased by the height to which he can rise above us.

Ginevra's conduct remained a riddle to all her companions. Her friends and her foes were alike surprised, for she was allowed to have every good quality excepting forgiveness of injuries. Though the opportunities for showing this vice of temper had rarely been offered to Ginevra by the incidents of studio life, the instances she had happened to give of her vindictive spirit and determination had none the less made a deep impression on her companions' minds. After many guesses, Mademoiselle Roguin finally regarded the Italian's silence as evidence of a magnanimity above all praise; and her party, inspired by her, conceived a plan to humiliate the aristocrats of

the studio. They achieved their purpose by a fire of sarcasms directed at the pride and airs of the party of the right.

Madame Servin's arrival put an end to this contest of self-assertiveness. Amélie, with the shrewdness which is always coupled with malice, had remarked, watched, and wondered at the excessive absence of mind which hindered Ginevra from hearing the keenly polite dispute of which she was the subject. The revenge which Mademoiselle Roguin and her followers were wreaking on Mademoiselle Thirion and her party had thus the fatal effect of setting the young *Ultras* to discover the cause of Ginevra's absorbed silence. The beautiful Italian became the centre of observation, and was watched by her friends as much as by her enemies. It is very difficult to hide the slightest excitement, the most trifling feeling, from fifteen idle and inquisitive girls whose mischief and wits crave only for secrets to guess, and intrigues to plot or to baffle, and who can ascribe to a gesture, to a glance, to a word, so many meanings, that they can hardly fail to discover the true one. Thus Ginevra di Piombo's secret was in great peril of being found out.

At this moment Madame Servin's presence produced a diversion in the drama that was being obscurely played at the bottom of these young hearts; while its sentiments, its ideas, its development, were expressed by almost allegorical words, by significant looks, by gestures, and even by silence, often more emphatic than speech.

The moment Madame Servin came into the studio her eyes turned to the door by which Ginevra was standing. Under the present circumstances this look was not lost. If at first none of the maidens observed it, Mademoiselle Thirion remembered it afterwards, and accounted for the suspiciousness, the alarm, and mystery which gave a hunted expression to Madame Servin's eyes.

'Mesdemoiselles,' she said, 'Monsieur Servin cannot come to-day.' Then she paid some little compliment to each

pupil, all of them welcoming her in the girlish, caressing way which lies as much in the voice and eyes as in actions. She immediately went to Ginevra under an impulse of uneasiness, which she vainly tried to conceal. The Italian and the painter's wife exchanged friendly nods, and then stood in silence, one painting, the other watching her paint. The officer's breathing was easily audible, but Madame Servin could take no notice of it; and her dissimulation was so complete that Ginevra was tempted to accuse her of wilful deafness. At this moment the stranger turned on the bed. The Italian girl looked Madame Servin steadily in the face, and, without betraying the smallest agitation, the lady said, 'Your copy is as fine as the original. If I had to choose, I should really be puzzled.'

'Monsieur Servin has not let his wife into the secret of this mystery,' thought Ginevra, who, after answering the young wife with a gentle smile of incredulity, sang a snatch of some national canzonetta to cover any sounds the prisoner might make.

It was so unusual to hear the studious Italian sing, that all the girls looked at her in surprise. Later this incident served as evidence to the charitable suppositions of hatred. Madame Servin soon went away, and the hours of study ended without further event. Ginevra let all her companions leave, affecting to work on; but she unconsciously betrayed her wish to be alone, for as the pupils made ready to go she looked at them with ill-disguised impatience. Mademoiselle Thirion, who within these few hours had become a cruel foe to the young girl, who was her superior in everything, guessed by the instinct of hatred that her rival's affected industry covered a mystery. She had been struck more than once by the attention with which Ginevra seemed to be listening to a sound no one else could hear. The expression she now read in the Italian's eyes was as a flash of illumination. She was the last to leave, and went in on her way down to see Madame

Servin, with whom she stayed a few minutes. Then, pretending that she had forgotten her bag, she very softly went upstairs again to the studio, and discovered Ginevra at the top of a hastily constructed scaffolding, so lost in contemplation of the unknown soldier that she did not hear the light sound of her companion's footsteps. It is true that Amélie walked on eggs—to use a phrase of Walter Scott's; she retired to the door and coughed. Ginevra started, turned her head, saw her enemy, and coloured; then she quickly untied the blind, to mislead her as to her purpose, and came down. After putting away her paint-box, she left the studio, carrying stamped upon her heart the image of a man's head as charming as the Endymion, Girodet's masterpiece, which she had copied a few days previously.

'So young a man, and proscribed! Who can he be?—for it is not Marshal Ney.'

These two sentences are the simplest expression of all the ideas which Ginevra turned over in her mind during two days. The next day but one, notwithstanding her hurry to be first at the painting gallery, she found that Mademoiselle Thirion had already come in a carriage. Ginevra and her enemy watched each other for some time, but each kept her countenance impenetrable by the other. Amélie had seen the stranger's handsome face; but happily, and at the same time unhappily, the eagles and the uniform were not within the range of her eye through the crack. She lost herself in conjecture. Suddenly Servin came in, much earlier than usual.

'Mademoiselle Ginevra,' said he, after casting an eye round the gallery, 'why have you placed yourself there? The light is bad. Come nearer to these young ladies, and lower your blind a little.'

Then he sat down by Laure, whose work deserved his most lenient criticism.

'Well done!' he exclaimed, 'this head is capitally done. You will be a second Ginevra.'

The master went from easel to easel, blaming, flattering, and jesting; and making himself, as usual, more feared for his jests than for his reproofs.

The Italian had not obeyed his wishes; she remained at her post with the firm intention of staying there. She took out a sheet of paper and began to sketch in sepia the head of the unhappy refugee. A work conceived of with passion always bears a particular stamp. The faculty of giving truth to a rendering of nature or of a thought constitutes genius, and passion can often take its place. Thus in the circumstances in which Ginevra found herself, either the intuition she owed to her memory, which had been deeply struck, or perhaps necessity, the mother of greatness, lent her a supernatural flash of talent. The officer's head was thrown off on the paper with an inward trembling that she ascribed to fear, and which a physiologist would have recognised as the fever of inspiration. From time to time she stole a furtive glance at her companions, so as to be able to hide the sketch in case of any indiscretion on their part. But in spite of her sharp look-out, there was a moment when she failed to perceive that her relentless enemy, under the shelter of a huge portfolio, had turned her eyeglass on the mysterious drawing. Mademoiselle Thirion, recognising the refugee's features, raised her head suddenly, and Ginevra slipped away the sheet of paper.

'Why do you stay there, in spite of my opinion, Mademoiselle?' the professor gravely asked Ginevra.

The girl hastily turned her easel so that no one could see her sketch, and said, in an agitated voice, as she showed it to her master—

'Don't you think with me that this is a better light? May I not stay where I am?'

Servin turned pale. As nothing can escape the keen eyes of hatred, Mademoiselle Thirion threw herself, so to speak, into the excited feelings that agitated the professor and his pupil.

'You are right,' said Servin. 'But you will soon know more than I do,' he added, with a forced laugh. There was a silence, during which the master looked at the head of the officer. 'This is a masterpiece, worthy of Salvator Rosa!' he exclaimed, with an artist's vehemence.

At this exclamation all the young people rose, and Mademoiselle Thirion came forward with the swiftness of a tiger springing on its prey. At this instant the prisoner, roused by the turmoil, woke up. Ginevra overset her stool, spoke a few incoherent sentences, and began to laugh; but she had folded the portrait in half and thrown it into a portfolio before her terrible enemy could see it. The girls crowded round the easel; Servin enlarged in a loud voice on the beauties of the copy on which his favourite pupil was just now engaged; and all the party were cheated by this stratagem, excepting Amélie, who placed herself behind her companions and tried to open the portfolio into which she had seen the sketch put. Ginevra seized it and set it in front of her without a word, and the two girls gazed at each other in silence.

'Come, young ladies, to your places!' said Servin. 'If you want to know as much as Mademoiselle di Piombo, you must not be always talking of fashions and balls, and trifling so much.'

When the girls had all returned to their easels, the master sat down by Ginevra.

'Was it not better that this mystery should be discovered by me than by any one else?' said the Italian girl in a low tone.

'Yes,' answered the painter. 'You are patriotic; but even if you had not been, you are still the person to whom I should entrust it.'

The master and pupil understood each other, and Ginevra was not now afraid to ask, 'Who is he?'

'An intimate friend of Labédoyère's; the man who,

next to the unfortunate Colonel, did most to effect a junction between the 7th and the Grenadiers of Elba. He was a Major in the Guards, and has just come back from Waterloo.'

'Why have you not burnt his uniform and shako, and put him into civilian dress?' asked Ginevra vehemently.

'Some clothes are to be brought for him this evening.'

'You should have shut up the studio for a few days.'

'He is going away.'

'Does he wish to die?' said the girl. 'Let him stay with you during these first days of the storm. Paris is the only place in France where a man may be safely hidden. Is he a friend of yours?' she added.

'No. He has no claim to my regard but his misfortunes. This is how he fell into my hands; my father-in-law, who had rejoined his regiment during this campaign, met the poor young man, and saved him very cleverly from those who have arrested Labédoyère. He wanted to defend him, like a madman!'

'And do you call him so!' cried Ginevra, with a glance of surprise at the painter, who did not speak for a moment.

'My father-in-law is too closely watched to be able to keep any one in his house,' he went on. 'He brought him here by night last week. I hoped to hide him from every eye by keeping him in this corner, the only place in the house where he can be safe.'

'If I can be of any use, command me,' said Ginevra. 'I know Marshal Feltre.'

'Well, we shall see,' replied the painter.

This conversation had lasted too long not to be remarked by all the other pupils. Servin left Ginevra, came back to each easel, and gave such long lessons that he was still upstairs when the clock struck the hour at which his pupils usually left.

'You have forgotten your bag, Mademoiselle,' cried the professor, running after the young lady, who condescended to act the spy to gratify her hatred.

The inquisitive pupil came back for the bag, expressing some surprise at her own carelessness; but Servin's attention was to her additional proof of the existence of a mystery which was undoubtedly a serious one. She had already planned what should follow, and could say, like the Abbé Vertot, 'I have laid my siege.' She ran downstairs noisily, and violently slammed the door leading to Servin's rooms, that it might be supposed she had gone out; but she softly went upstairs again, and hid behind the door of the studio.

When the painter and Ginevra supposed themselves alone, he tapped in a particular manner at the door of the attic, which at once opened on its rusty, creaking hinges. The Italian girl saw a tall and well-built youth, whose Imperial uniform set her heart beating. The officer carried his arm in a sling, and his pale face told of acute suffering. He started at seeing her, a stranger. Amélie, who could see nothing, was afraid to stay any longer; but she had heard the creaking of the door, and that was enough. She silently stole away.

'Fear nothing,' said the painter. 'Mademoiselle is the daughter of the Emperor's most faithful friend, the Baron di Piombo.'

The young officer felt no doubt of Ginevra's loyalty when once he had looked at her.

'You are wounded?' she said.

'Oh, it is nothing, Mademoiselle; the cut is healing.'

At this moment the shrill and piercing tones of men in the street came up to the studio, crying out, 'This is the sentence which condemns to death——' All three shuddered. The soldier was the first to hear a name at which he turned pale.

'Labédoyère!' he exclaimed, dropping on to a stool.

They looked at each other in silence. Drops of sweat

gathered on the young man's livid brow; with a gesture of despair he clutched the black curls of his hair, resting his elbow on Ginevra's easel.

'After all,' said he, starting to his feet, 'Labédoyère and I knew what we were doing. We knew the fate that awaited us if we triumphed or if we failed. He is dying for the cause, while I am in hiding——'

He hurried towards the studio door; but Ginevra, more nimble than he, rushed forward and stopped the way.

'Can you restore the Emperor?' she said. 'Do you think you can raise the giant again, when he could not keep his feet?'

'What then is to become of me?' said the refugee, addressing the two friends whom chance had sent him. 'I have not a relation in the world; Labédoyère was my friend and protector, I am now alone; to-morrow I shall be exiled or condemned; I have never had any fortune but my pay; I spent my last crown-piece to come and snatch Labédoyère from death and get him away. Death is an obvious necessity to me. When a man is determined to die, he must know how to sell his head to the executioner. I was thinking just now that an honest man's life is well worth that of two traitors, and that a dagger-thrust, judiciously placed, may give one immortality.'

This passion of despair frightened the painter, and even Ginevra, who fully understood the young man. The Italian admired the beautiful head and the delightful voice, of which the accents of rage scarcely disguised the sweetness; then she suddenly dropped balm on all the hapless man's wounds.

'Monsieur!' said she, 'as to your pecuniary difficulties, allow me to offer you the money I myself have saved. My father is rich; I am his only child; he loves me, and I am quite sure he will not blame me. Have no scruples in accepting it; our wealth comes from the Emperor, we have nothing which is not the bounty of his munificence. It is not gratitude to help one of his faithful soldiers? So

take this money with as little ceremony as I make about offering it. It is only money,' she added in a scornful tone. 'Then, as to friends—you will find friends!' And she proudly raised her head, while her eyes shone with unwonted brilliancy. 'The head which must fall to-morrow—the mark of a dozen guns—saves yours,' she went on. 'Wait till this storm is over, and you can take service in a foreign land if you are not forgotten, or in the French army if you are.'

In the comfort offered by a woman there is a delicacy of feeling which always has a touch of something motherly, something far-seeing and complete; but when such words of peace and hope are seconded by grace of gesture, and the eloquence which comes from the heart, above all, when the comforter is beautiful, it is hard for a young man to resist. The young Colonel inhaled love by every sense. A faint flush tinged his white cheeks, and his eyes lost a little of the melancholy that dimmed them as he said, in a strange tone of voice, 'You are an angel of goodness!—But, Labédoyère!' he added, 'Labédoyère!'

At this cry they all three looked at each other, speechless, and understood each other. They were friends, not of twenty minutes, but of twenty years.

'My dear fellow,' said Servin, 'can you save him?'

'I can avenge him.'

Ginevra was thrilled. Though the stranger was handsome, his appearance had not moved her. The gentle pity that women find in their heart for suffering which is not ignoble had, in Ginevra, stifled every other emotion; but to hear a cry of revenge, to find in this fugitive an Italian soul and Corsican magnanimity! This was too much for her; she gazed at the officer with respectful emotion, which powerfully stirred her heart. It was the first time a man had ever made her feel so strongly. Like all women, it pleased her to imagine that the soul of this stranger must be in harmony with the remarkable beauty of his features and the fine proportions of his

figure, which she admired as an artist. Led by chance curiosity to pity, from pity to eager interest, she now from interest had reached sensations so strong and deep that she thought it rash to remain there any longer.

'Till to-morrow,' she said, leaving her sweetest smile with the officer, to console him.

As he saw that smile, which threw a new light, as it were, on Ginevra's face, the stranger for a moment forgot all else.

'To-morrow,' he repeated sadly. 'To-morrow, *La-bédoyère*——'

Ginevra turned to him and laid a finger on her lips, looking at him as though she would say, 'Be calm, be prudent.'

Then the young man exclaimed: '*O Dio! Chi non vorrei vivere dopo averla veduta!*' 'O God! who would not live after having seen her!' The peculiar accent with which he spoke the words startled Ginevra.

'You are a Corsican!' she exclaimed, coming back to him, her heart beating with gladness.

'I was born in Corsica,' he replied; 'but I was taken to Genoa when very young; and, as soon as I was of an age to enter the army, I enlisted.'

The stranger's handsome person, the transcendent charm he derived from his attachment to the Emperor, his wound, his misfortunes, even his danger, all vanished before Ginevra's eyes, or rather all were fused in one new and exquisite sentiment. This refugee was a son of Corsica, and spoke its beloved tongue. In a minute the girl stood motionless, spellbound by a magical sensation. She saw before her eyes a living picture to which a combination of human feeling and chance lent dazzling hues. At Servin's invitation the officer had taken his seat on an ottoman, the painter had untied the string which supported his guest's arm, and was now undoing the bandages in order to dress the wound. Ginevra shuddered as she saw the long wide gash, made by a sabre-cut, on the

young man's forearm, and gave a little groan. The stranger looked up at her and began to smile. There was something very touching that went to the soul in Servin's attentive care as he removed the lint and touched the tender flesh, while the wounded man's face, though pale and sickly, expressed pleasure rather than suffering as he looked at the young girl.

An artist could not help admiring the antithesis of sentiments, and the contrast of colour between the whiteness of the linen and the bare arm and the officer's blue and red coat. Soft dusk had now fallen on the studio, but a last sunbeam shone in on the spot where the refugee was sitting, in such a way that his pale, noble face, his black hair, his uniform were all flooded with light. This simple effect the superstitious Italian took for an omen of good luck. The stranger seemed to her a celestial messenger who had spoken to her in the language of her native land, and put her under the spell of childish memories; while in her heart a feeling had birth as fresh and pure as her first age of innocence. In a very short instant she stood pensive, lost in infinite thought; then she blushed to have betrayed her absence of mind, exchanged a swift, sweet look with the officer, and made her escape, seeing him still.

The next day there was no painting lesson; Ginevra could come to the studio, and the prisoner could be with his fellow-countrywoman. Servin, who had a sketch to finish, allowed the officer to sit there while he played guardian to the two young people who frequently spoke in Corsican. The poor soldier told of his sufferings during the retreat from Moscow; for, at the age of nineteen, he had found himself at the passage of the Beresina, alone of all his regiment, having lost in his comrades the only men who could care for him, an orphan. He described, in words of fire, the great disaster of Waterloo.

His voice was music to the Italian girl. Brought up

in Corsican ways, Ginevra was, to some extent, a child of nature; falsehood was unknown to her, and she gave herself up without disguise to her impressions, owning them, or rather letting them be seen without the trickery, the mean and calculating vanity of the Parisian girl. During this day she remained more than once, her palette in one hand, a brush in the other, while the brush was undipped in the colours on the palette; her eyes fixed on the officer's face, her lips slightly parted, she sat listening, ready to lay on the touch which was not given. She was not surprised to find such sweetness in the young man's eyes, for she felt her own soften in spite of her determination to keep them severe and cold. Thus, for hours, she painted with resolute attention, not raising her head because he was there watching her work. The first time he sat down to gaze at her in silence, she said to him in an agitated voice, after a long pause, 'Does it amuse you, then, to look on at painting?'

That day she learnt that his name was Luigi. Before they parted it was agreed that if any important political events should occur on the days when the studio was open, Ginevra was to inform him by singing in an under-tone certain Italian airs.

On the following day Mademoiselle Thirion informed all her companions, as a great secret, that Ginevra di Piombo had a lover—a young man who came during the hours devoted to lessons—to hide in the dark closet of the studio.

'You, who take her part,' said she to Mademoiselle Roguin, 'watch her well, and you will see how she spends her time.'

So Ginevra was watched with diabolical vigilance. Her songs were listened to, her glances spied. At moments when she believed that no one saw her, a dozen eyes were incessantly centred on her. And being forewarned, the girls interpreted in their true sense the agitations which passed across the Italian's radiant face,

and her snatches of song, and the attention with which she listened to the muffled sounds which she alone could hear through the partition.

By the end of a week, only Laure, of the fifteen students, had resisted the temptation to scrutinise Louis through the crack in the panel, or, by an instinct of weakness, still defended the beautiful Corsican girl. Mademoiselle Roguin wanted to make her wait on the stairs at the hour when they all left, to prove to her the intimacy between Ginevra and the handsome young man, by finding them together; but she refused to condescend to an espionage which curiosity could not justify, and thus became an object of general reprobation.

Ere long the daughter of the Gentleman-usher thought it unbecoming in her to work in the studio of a painter whose opinions were tainted with patriotism or Bonapartism—which at that time were regarded as one and the same thing; so she came no more to Servin's. Though Amélie forgot Ginevra, the evil she had sown bore fruit. Insensibly, by chance, for gossip, or out of prudery, the other damsels informed their mothers of the strange adventure in progress at the studio. One day Mathilde Roguin did not come; the next time another was absent; at last the three or four pupils, who had still remained, came no more. Ginevra and her little friend, Mademoiselle Laure, were for two or three days the sole occupants of the deserted studio.

The Italian did not observe the isolation in which she was left, and did not even wonder at the cause of her companions' absence. Having devised the means of communicating with Louis, she lived in the studio as in a delightful retreat, secluded in the midst of the world, thinking only of the officer, and of the dangers which threatened him. This young creature, though sincerely admiring those noble characters who would not be false to their political faith, urged Louis to submit at once to royal authority, in order to keep him in France, while

Louis refused to submit, that he might not have to leave his hiding-place.

If, indeed, passions only have their birth and grow up under the influence of romantic causes, never had so many circumstances concurred to link two beings by one feeling. Ginevra's regard for Louis, and his for her, thus made greater progress in a month than a fashionable friendship can make in ten years in a drawing-room. Is not adversity the touchstone of character? Hence Ginevra could really appreciate Louis, and know him, and they soon felt a reciprocal esteem. Ginevra, who was older than Louis, found it sweet to be courted by a young man already so great, so tried by fortune, who united the experience of a man with the graces of youth. Louis, on his part, felt unspeakable delight in allowing himself to be apparently protected by a girl of five-and-twenty. Was it not a proof of love? The union in Ginevra of pride and sweetness, of strength and weakness, had an irresistible charm; Louis was indeed completely her slave. In short, they were already so deeply in love, that they felt no need either to deny it to themselves, nor to tell it.

One day, towards evening, Ginevra heard the signal agreed on—Louis tapped on the woodwork with a pin, so gently as to make no more noise than a spider attaching its thread—thus asking if he might come out. She glanced round the studio, did not see little Laure, and answered the summons; but as the door was opened, Louis caught sight of the girl, and hastily retreated. Ginevra, much surprised, looked about her, saw Laure, and going up to her easel, said, 'You are staying very late, dear. And that head seems to me finished; there is only a reflected light to put in on that lock of hair.'

'It would be very kind of you,' said Laure, in a tremulous voice, 'if you would correct this copy for me; I should have something of your doing to keep.'

'Of course I will,' said Ginevra, sure of thus dismissing

her. 'I thought,' she added, as she put in a few light touches, 'that you had a long way to go home from the studio.'

'Oh! Ginevra, I am going away for good,' cried the girl, sadly.

'You are leaving Monsieur Servin?' asked the Italian, not seeming affected by her words, as she would have been a month since.

'Have you not noticed, Ginevra, that for some time there has been nobody here but you and me?'

'It is true,' replied Ginevra, suddenly struck as by a reminiscence. 'Are they ill, or going to be married, or are all their fathers employed now at the palace?'

'They have all left Monsieur Servin,' said Laure.

'And why?'

'On your account, Ginevra.'

'Mine!' repeated the Corsican, rising, with a threatening brow, and a proud sparkle in her eyes.

'Oh, do not be angry, dear Ginevra,' Laure piteously exclaimed. 'But my mother wishes that I should leave too. All the young ladies said that you had an intrigue; that Monsieur Servin had lent himself to allowing a young man who loves you to stay in the dark closet; but I never believed these calumnies, and did not tell my mother. Last evening Madame Roguin met my mother at a ball, and asked her whether she still sent me here. When mamma said Yes, she repeated all those girls' tales. Mamma scolded me well; she declared I must have known it all, and that I had failed in the confidence of a daughter in her mother by not telling her. Oh, my dear Ginevra, I, who always took you for my model, how grieved I am not to be allowed to stay on with you——'

'We shall meet again in the world; young women get married,' said Ginevra.

'When they are rich,' replied Laure.

'Come to see me, my father has wealth——'

'Ginevra,' Laure went on, much moved, 'Madame

Roguin and my mother are coming to-morrow to see Monsieur Servin, and complain of his conduct. At least let him be prepared.'

A thunderbolt falling at her feet would have astonished Ginevra less than this announcement.

'What could it matter to them?' she innocently asked.

'Every one thinks it very wrong. Mamma says it is quite improper.'

'And you, Laure, what do you think about it?'

The girl looked at Ginevra, and their hearts met. Laure could no longer restrain her tears; she threw herself on her friend's neck and kissed her. At this moment Servin came in.

'Mademoiselle Ginevra,' he said, enthusiastically, 'I have finished my picture, it is being varnished.—But what is the matter? All the young ladies are making holiday, it would seem, or are gone into the country.'

Laure wiped away her tears, took leave of Servin, and went away.

'The studio has been deserted for some days,' said Ginevra, 'and those young ladies will return no more.'

'Pooh!'

'Nay, do not laugh,' said Ginevra, 'listen to me. I am the involuntary cause of your loss of repute.'

The artist smiled, and said, interrupting his pupil, 'My repute? But in a few days my picture will be exhibited.'

'It is not your talent that is in question,' said the Italian girl; 'but your morality. The young ladies have spread a report that Louis is shut up here, and that you—lent yourself to our love-making.'

'There is some truth in that, Mademoiselle,' replied the professor. 'The girls' mothers are airified prudes,' he went on. 'If they had but come to me, everything would have been explained. But what do I care for such things? Life is too short!'

And the painter snapped his fingers in the air.

Louis, who had heard part of the conversation, came out of his cupboard.

'You are losing all your pupils,' he cried, 'and I shall have been your ruin!'

The artist took his hand and Ginevra's, and joined them. 'Will you marry each other, my children?' he asked, with touching bluntness. They both looked down, and their silence was their first mutual confession of love. 'Well,' said Servin, 'and you will be happy, will you not? Can anything purchase such happiness as that of two beings like you?'

'I am rich,' said Ginevra, 'if you will allow me to indemnify you——'

'Indemnify!' Servin broke in. 'Why, as soon as it is known that I have been the victim of a few little fools, and that I have sheltered a fugitive, all the Liberals in Paris will send me their daughters! Perhaps I shall be in your debt then.'

Louis grasped his protector's hand, unable to speak a word; but at last he said, in a broken voice, 'To you I shall owe all my happiness.'

'Be happy; I unite you,' said the painter with comic unction, laying his hands on the heads of the lovers.

This pleasantry put an end to their emotional mood. They looked at each other, and all three laughed. The Italian girl wrung Louis' hand with a passionate grasp, and with a simple impulse worthy of her Corsican traditions.

'Ah, but, my dear children,' said Servin, 'you fancy that now everything will go on swimmingly? Well, you are mistaken.' They looked at him in amazement.

'Do not be alarmed; I am the only person inconvenienced by your giddy behaviour. But Madame Servin is the pink of propriety, and I really do not know how we shall settle matters with her.'

'Heavens! I had forgotten. To-morrow Madame Roguin and Laure's mother are coming to you——'

'I understand!' said the painter, interrupting her.

'But you can justify yourself,' said the girl, with a toss of her head of emphatic pride. 'Monsieur Louis,' and she turned to him with an arch look, 'has surely no longer an antipathy for the King's Government?'—'Well, then,' she went on, after seeing him smile, 'to-morrow morning I shall address a petition to one of the most influential persons at the Ministry of War, a man who can refuse the Baron di Piombo's daughter nothing. We will obtain a tacit pardon for Captain Louis—for *they* will not recognise your grade as Colonel. And you,' she added, speaking to Servin, 'may annihilate the mammas of my charitable young companions by simply telling them the truth.'

'You are an angel!' said Servin.

While this scene was going on at the studio, Ginevra's father and mother were impatiently expecting her return.

'It is six o'clock, and Ginevra is not yet home,' said Bartolomeo.

'She was never so late before,' replied his wife.

The old people look at each other with all the signs of very unusual anxiety. Bartolomeo, too much excited to sit still, rose and paced the room twice, briskly enough for a man of seventy-seven. Thanks to a strong constitution, he had changed but little since the day of his arrival at Paris, and tall as he was, he was still upright. His hair, thin and white now, had left his head bald, a broad and bossy skull which gave token of great strength and firmness. His face, deeply furrowed, had grown full and wide, with the pale complexion that inspires veneration. The fire of a passionate nature still lurked in the unearthly glow of his eyes, and the brows, which were not quite white, preserved their terrible mobility. The aspect of the man was severe, but it could be seen that Bartolomeo had the right to be so. His kindness and gentleness were known only to his wife and daughter. In his official position, or

before strangers, he never set aside the majesty which time had lent to his appearance; and his habit of knitting those thick brows, of setting every line in his face, and assuming a Napoleonic fixity of gaze, made him seem as cold as marble.

In the course of his political life he had been so generally feared that he was thought unsociable; but it is not difficult to find the causes of such a reputation. Piombo's life, habits, and fidelity were a censure on most of the courtiers. Notwithstanding the secret missions entrusted to his discretion, which to any other man would have proved lucrative, he had not more than thirty thousand francs a year in Government securities. And when we consider the low price of stock under the Empire, and Napoleon's liberality to those of his faithful adherents who knew how to ask, it is easy to perceive that the Baron di Piombo was a man of stern honesty; he owed his Baron's plumage only to the necessity of bearing a title when sent by Napoleon to a foreign Court.

Bartolomeo had always professed implacable hatred of the traitors whom Napoleon had gathered about him, believing he could win them over by his victories. It was he—so it was said—who took three steps towards the door of the Emperor's room, after advising him to get rid of three men then in France, on the day before he set out on his famous and brilliant campaign of 1814. Since the second return of the Bourbons, Bartolomeo had ceased to wear the ribbon of the Legion of Honour. No man ever offered a finer image of the old Republicans, the incorruptible supporters of the Empire, who survived as the living derelicts of the two most vigorous Governments the world has perhaps ever seen. If Baron di Piombo had displeased some courtiers, Daru, Drouot, Carnot were his friends. And, indeed, since Waterloo, he cared no more about other political figures than for the puffs of smoke he blew from his cigar.

With the moderate sum which *Madame*, Napoleon's mother, had paid him for his estates in Corsica, Bartolomeo di Piombo had acquired the old Hôtel de Portenduère, in which he made no alterations. Living almost always in official residences at the cost of the Government, he had resided in this mansion only since the catastrophe of Fontainebleau. Like all simple folks of lofty character, the Baron and his wife cared nothing for external splendour; they still used the old furniture they had found in the house. The reception rooms of this dwelling, lofty, gloomy, and bare, the huge mirrors set in old gilt frames almost black with age, the furniture from the time of Louis XIV., were in keeping with Bartolomeo and his wife—figures worthy of antiquity. Under the Empire, and during the Hundred Days, while holding offices that brought handsome salaries, the old Corsican had kept house in grand style, but rather to do honour to his position than with a view to display.

His life, and that of his wife and daughter, were so frugal, so quiet, that their modest fortune sufficed for their needs. To them their child Ginevra outweighed all the riches on earth. And when, in May 1814, Baron di Piombo resigned his place, dismissed his household, and locked his stable-doors, Ginevra, as simple and unpretentious as her parents, had not a regret. Like all great souls, she found luxury in strength of feeling, as she sought happiness in solitude and work.

And these three loved each other too much for the externals of life to have any value in their eyes. Often —and especially since Napoleon's second and fearful fall —Bartolomeo and his wife spent evenings of pure delight in listening to Ginevra as she played the piano or sang. To them there was an immense mystery of pleasure in their daughter's presence, in her lightest word; they followed her with their eyes with tender solicitude; they heard her step in the courtyard, however lightly she trod. Like lovers, they would all three sit silent for hours,

hearing, better than in words, the eloquence of each other's soul. This deep feeling, the very life of the two old people, filled all their thoughts. Not three lives were here, but one, which, like the flame on a hearth, burnt up in three tongues of fire.

Though now and then memories of Napoleon's bounty and misfortunes, or the politics of the day, took the place of their constant preoccupation, they could talk of them without breaking their community of thought. For did not Ginevra share their political passions? What could be more natural than the eagerness with which they withdrew into the heart of their only child? Until now the business of public life had absorbed Baron di Piombo's energies; but in resigning office the Corsican felt the need of throwing his energy into the last feeling that was left to him; and, besides the tie that bound a father and mother to their daughter, there was perhaps, unknown to these three despotic spirits, a powerful reason in the fanaticism of their reciprocal devotion; their love was undivided; Ginevra's whole heart was given to her father, as Piombo's was to her; and certainly, if it is true that we are more closely attached to one another by our faults than by our good qualities, Ginevra responded wonderfully to all her father's passions. Herein lay the single defect of this threefold existence. Ginevra was wholly given over to her vindictive impulses, carried away by them, as Bartolomeo had been in his youth. The Corsican delighted in encouraging these savage emotions in his daughter's heart, exactly as a lion teaches his whelps to spring on their prey. But as this apprenticeship to revenge could only be carried out under the parental roof, Ginevra never forgave her father anything; he always had to succumb. Piombo regarded these factitious quarrels as mere childishness, but the child thus acquired a habit of domineering over her parents. In the midst of these tempests which Bartolomeo loved to raise, a tender word, a look, was enough to soothe their angry

spirits, and they were never so near kissing as when threatening wrath.

However, from the age of about five, Ginevra, growing wiser than her father, constantly avoided these scenes. Her faithful nature, her devotion, the affection which governed all her thoughts, and her admirable good sense, had got the better of her rages; still a great evil had resulted: Ginevra lived with her father and mother on a footing of equality which is always disastrous.

To complete the picture of all the changes that had happened to these three persons since their arrival in Paris, Piombo and his wife, people of no education, had allowed Ginevra to study as she would. Following her girlish fancy, she had tried and given up everything, returning to each idea, and abandoning each in turn, until painting had become her ruling passion; she would have been perfect if her mother had been capable of directing her studies, of enlightening and harmonising her natural gifts. Her faults were the outcome of the pernicious training that the old Corsican had delighted to give her.

After making the floor creak for some minutes under his feet, the old man rang the bell. A servant appeared.

'Go to meet Mademoiselle Ginevra,' said the master.

'I have always been sorry that we have no longer a carriage for her,' said the Baroness.

'She would not have one,' replied Piombo, looking at his wife; and she, accustomed for twenty years to obedience as her part, cast down her eyes.

Tall, thin, pale, and wrinkled, and now past seventy, the Baroness was exactly like the old woman whom Schnetz introduces into the Italian scenes of his genre-pictures; she commonly sat so silent that she might have been taken for a second Mrs. Shandy; but a word, a look, a gesture would betray that her feelings had all the vigour and freshness of youth. Her dress, devoid of smartness, was often devoid of taste. She usually remained passive, sunk in an armchair, like a Sultana

valideh, waiting for, or admiring Ginevra—her pride and life. Her daughter's beauty, dress, and grace seemed to have become her own. All was well with her if Ginevra were content. Her hair had turned white, and a few locks were visible above her furrowed brow, and at the side of her withered cheeks.

'For about a fortnight now,' said she, 'Ginevra has been coming in late.'

'Jean will not go fast enough,' cried the impatient old man, crossing over the breast of his blue coat; he snatched up his hat, crammed it on to his head, and was off.

'You will not get far,' his wife called after him.

In fact, the outer gate opened and shut, and the old mother heard Ginevra's steps in the courtyard. Bartolomeo suddenly reappeared, carrying his daughter in triumph, while she struggled in his arms.

'Here she is! La Ginevra, la Ginevrettina, la Ginevrina, la Ginevrola, la Ginevretta, la Ginevra bella!'

'Father! you are hurting me!'

Ginevra was immediately set down with a sort of respect. She nodded her head with a graceful gesture to reassure her mother, who was alarmed, and to convey that it had been only an excuse. Then the Baroness's pale, dull face regained a little colour, and even a kind of cheerfulness. Piombo rubbed his hands together extremely hard—the most certain symptom of gladness; he had acquired the habit at Court when seeing Napoleon in a rage with any of his generals or ministers who served him ill, or who had committed some blunder. When once the muscles of his face were relaxed, the smallest line in his forehead expressed benevolence. These two old folks at this moment were exactly like drooping plants, which are restored to life by a little water after a long drought.

'Dinner, dinner!' cried the Baron, holding out his hand to Ginevra, whom he addressed as Signora Piombellina, another token of good spirits, to which his daughter replied with a smile.

'By the way,' said Piombo, as they rose from table, 'do you know that your mother has remarked that for a month past you have stayed at the studio much later than usual? Painting before parents, it would seem.'

'Oh, dear father——'

'Ginevra is preparing some surprise for us, no doubt,' said the mother.

'You are going to bring me a picture of your painting?' cried the Corsican, clapping his hands.

'Yes; I am very busy at the studio,' she replied.

'What ails you, Ginevra? you are so pale,' asked her mother.

'No!' exclaimed the girl, with a resolute gesture. 'No! it shall never be said that Ginevra Piombo ever told a lie in her life.'

On hearing this strange exclamation, Piombo and his wife looked at their daughter with surprise.

'I love a young man,' she added, in a broken voice. Then, not daring to look at her parents, her heavy eyelids drooped as if to veil the fire in her eyes.

'Is he a prince?' asked her father ironically; but his tone of voice made both the mother and daughter tremble.

'No, father,' she modestly replied, 'he is a young man of no fortune——'

'Then is he so handsome?'

'He is unfortunate.'

'What is he?'

'As a comrade of Labédoyère's he was outlawed, homeless; Servin hid him, and——'

'Servin is a good fellow, and did well,' cried Piombo. 'But you, daughter, have done ill to love any man but your father——'

'Love is not within my control,' said Ginevra gently.

'I had flattered myself,' said her father, 'that my Ginevra would be faithful to me till my death; that my care and her mother's would be all she would have known;

that our tenderness would never meet with a rival affection in her heart; that——'

'Did I ever reproach you for your fanatical devotion to Napoleon?' said Ginevra. 'Have you never loved any one but me? Have you not been away on Embassies for months at a time? Have I not borne your absence bravely? Life has necessities to which we must yield.'

'Ginevra!'

'No, you do not love me for my own sake, and your reproaches show intolerable selfishness.'

'And you accuse your father's love!' cried Piombo with flaming looks.

'Father, I will never accuse you,' replied Ginevra, more gently than her trembling mother expected. 'You have right on the side of your egoism, as I have right on the side of my love. Heaven is my witness that no daughter ever better fulfilled her duty to her parents. I have never known anything but love and happiness in what many daughters regard as obligations. Now, for fifteen years, I have never been anywhere but under your protecting wing, and it has been a very sweet delight to me to charm your lives. But am I then ungrateful in giving myself up to the joy of loving, and in wishing for a husband to protect me after you?'

'So you balance accounts with your father, Ginevra!' said the old man in ominous tones.

There was a frightful pause; no one dared to speak. Finally, Bartolomeo broke the silence by exclaiming in a heart-rending voice: 'Oh, stay with us; stay with your old father! I could not bear to see you love a man. Ginevra, you will not have long to wait for your liberty——'

'But, my dear father, consider; we shall not leave you, we shall be two to love you; you will know the man to whose care you will bequeath me. You will be doubly loved by me and by him—by him, being part of me, and by me who am wholly he.'

'Oh, Ginevra, Ginevra!' cried the Corsican, clinching his fists, 'why were you not married when Napoleon had accustomed me to the idea, and introduced dukes and counts as your suitors.'

'They only loved me to order,' said the young girl. 'Besides, I did not wish to leave you; and they would have taken me away with them.'

'You do not wish to leave us alone,' said Piombo, 'but if you marry you isolate us. I know you, my child, you will love us no more. Elisa,' he added, turning to his wife, who sat motionless and, as it were, stupefied; 'we no longer have a daughter; she wants to be married.'

The old man sat down, after raising his hands in the air as though to invoke God; then he remained bent, crushed by his grief. Ginevra saw her father's agitation, and the moderation of his wrath pierced her to the heart; she had expected a scene and furies; she had not steeled her soul against his gentleness.

'My dear father,' she said in an appealing voice, 'no, you shall never be abandoned by your Ginevra. But love me too a little for myself. If only you knew how he loves me! Ah, he could never bear to cause me pain!'

'What, comparisons already!' cried Piombo in a terrible voice. 'No,' he went on, 'I cannot endure the idea. If he were to love you as you deserve, he would kill me; and if he were not to love you, I should stab him!'

Piombo's hands were trembling, his lips trembled, his whole frame trembled, and his eyes flashed lightnings; Ginevra alone could meet his gaze; for then her eyes too flashed fire, and the daughter was worthy of the father.

'To love you! What man is worthy of such a life?' he went on. 'To love you as a father even—is it not to live in Paradise? Who then could be worthy to be your husband?'

'He,' said Ginevra. 'He of whom I feel myself unworthy.'

'He,' echoed Piombo mechanically. 'Who? He?'

'The man I love.'

'Can he know you well enough already to adore you?'

'But, father,' said Ginevra, feeling a surge of impatience, 'even if he did not love me—so long as I love him——'

'You do love him then?' cried Piombo. Ginevra gently bowed her head. 'You love him more than you love me?'

'The two feelings cannot be compared,' she replied.

'One is stronger than the other?' said Piombo.

'Yes, I think so,' said Ginevra.

'You shall not marry him!' cried the Corsican in a voice that made the windows rattle.

'I will marry him!' replied Ginevra calmly.

'Good God!' cried the mother, 'how will this quarrel end? *Santa Virgina*, come between them!'

The Baron, who was striding up and down the room, came and seated himself. An icy sternness darkened his face; he looked steadfastly at his daughter, and said in a gentle and affectionate voice, 'Nay, Ginevra—you will not marry him. Oh, do not say you will, this evening. Let me believe that you will not. Do you wish to see your father on his knees before you, and his white hairs humbled. I will beseech you——'

'Ginevra Piombo is not accustomed to promise and not to keep her word,' said she; 'I am your child.'

'She is right,' said the Baroness, 'we come into the world to marry.'

'And so you encourage her in disobedience,' said the Baron to his wife, who, stricken by the reproof, froze into a statue.

'It is not disobedience to refuse to yield to an unjust command,' replied Ginevra.

'It cannot be unjust when it emanates from your father's lips, my child. Why do you rise in judgment

on me? Is not the repugnance I feel a counsel from on High? I am perhaps saving you from some misfortune.'

'The misfortune would be that he should not love me.'

'Always he!'

'Yes, always,' she said. 'He is my life, my joy, my thought. Even if I obeyed you, he would be always in my heart. If you forbid me to marry him, will it not make me hate you?'

'You love us no longer!' cried Piombo.

'Oh!' said Ginevra, shaking her head.

'Well, then, forget him. Be faithful to us. After us . . . you understand . . .'

'Father, would you make me wish that you were dead?' cried Ginevra.

'I shall outlive you; children who do not honour their parents die early,' cried her father at the utmost pitch of exasperation.

'All the more reason for marrying soon and being happy,' said she.

This coolness, this force of argument, brought Piombo's agitation to a crisis; the blood rushed violently to his head, his face turned purple. Ginevra shuddered; she flew like a bird on to her father's knees, threw her arms round his neck, stroked his hair, and exclaimed, quite overcome—

'Oh, yes, let me die first! I could not survive you, my dear, kind father.'

'Oh, my Ginevra, my foolish Ginevretta!' answered Piombo, whose rage melted under this caress as an icicle melts in the sunshine.

'It was time you should put an end to the matter,' said the Baroness in a broken voice.

'Poor mother!'

'Ah, Ginevretta, mia Ginevra bella!'

And the father played with his daughter as if she were a child of six; he amused himself with undoing the waving tresses of her hair and dancing her on his knee; there was dotage in his demonstrations of tenderness.

Presently his daughter scolded him as she kissed him, and tried, half in jest, to get leave to bring Louis to the house; but, jesting too, her father refused. She sulked, and recovered herself, and sulked again; then, at the end of the evening, she was only too glad to have impressed on her father the ideas of her love for Louis and of a marriage ere long.

Next day she said no more about it; she went later to the studio and returned early; she was more affectionate to her father than she had ever been, and showed herself grateful, as if to thank him for the consent to her marriage he seemed to give by silence. In the evening she played and sang for a long time, and exclaimed now and then, 'This nocturne requires a man's voice!' She was an Italian, and that says everything.

A week later her mother beckoned her; Ginevra went, and then in her ear she whispered, 'I have persuaded your father to receive him.'

'Oh, mother! you make me very happy.'

So that afternoon, Ginevra had the joy of coming home to her father's house leaning on Louis' arm. The poor officer came out of his hiding-place for the second time. Ginevra's active intervention addressed to the Duc de Feltre, then Minister of War, had been crowned with perfect success. Louis had just been reinstated as an officer on the reserve list. This was a very long step towards a prosperous future.

Informed by Ginevra of all the difficulties he would meet with in the Baron, the young officer dared not confess his dread of failing to please him. This man, so brave in adversity, so bold on the field of battle, quaked as he thought of entering the Piombos' drawing-room. Ginevra felt him tremble, and this emotion, of which their happiness was the first cause, was to her a fresh proof of his love.

'How pale you are!' said she, as they reached the gate of the hôtel.

'Oh, Ginevra! If my life alone were at stake——'

Though Bartolomeo had been informed by his wife of this official introduction of his daughter's lover, he did not rise to meet him, but remained in the armchair he usually occupied, and the severity of his countenance was icy.

'Father,' said Ginevra, 'I have brought you a gentleman whom you will no doubt be pleased to see. Monsieur Louis, a soldier who fought quite close to the Emperor at Mont-Saint-Jean ——'

The Baron rose, cast a furtive glance at Louis, and said in a sardonic tone—

'Monsieur wears no orders?'

'I no longer wear the Legion of Honour,' replied Louis bashfully, and he humbly remained standing.

Ginevra, hurt by her father's rudeness, brought forward a chair. The officer's reply satisfied the old Republican. Madame Piombo, seeing that her husband's brows were recovering their natural shape, said, to revive the conversation, 'Monsieur is wonderfully like Nina Porta. Do not you think that he has quite the face of a Porta?'

'Nothing can be more natural,' replied the young man, on whom Piombo's flaming eyes were fixed. 'Nina was my sister.'

'You are Luigi Porta?' asked the old man.

'Yes.'

Bartolomeo di Piombo rose, tottered, was obliged to lean on a chair, and looked at his wife. Elisa Piombo came up to him; then the two old folks silently left the room, arm in arm, with a look of horror at their daughter. Luigi Porta, quite bewildered, gazed at Ginevra, who turned as white as a marble statue, and remained with her eyes fixed on the door where her father and mother had disappeared. There was something so solemn in her silence and their retreat, that, for the first time in his life perhaps, a feeling of fear

came over him. She clasped her hands tightly together, and said in a voice so choked that it would have been inaudible to any one but a lover, 'How much woe in one word!'

'In the name of our love, what have I said?' asked Luigi Porta.

'My father has never told me our deplorable history,' she replied. 'And when we left Corsica I was too young to know anything about it.'

'Is it a Vendetta?' asked Luigi, trembling.

'Yes. By questioning my mother I learnt that the Porta had killed my brothers and burnt down our house. My father then massacred all your family. How did you survive, you whom he thought he had tied to the posts of a bed before setting fire to the house?'

'I do not know,' replied Luigi. 'When I was six I was taken to Genoa, to an old man named Colonna. No account of my family was ever given to me; I only knew that I was an orphan, and penniless. Colonna was like a father to me; I bore his name till I entered the army; then, as I needed papers to prove my identity, old Colonna told me that, helpless as I was, and hardly more than a child, I had enemies. He made me promise to take the name of Luigi only, to evade them.'

'Fly, fly, Luigi,' cried Ginevra. 'Yet, stay; I must go with you. So long as you are in my father's house you are safe. As soon as you quit it, take care of yourself. You will go from one danger to another. My father has two Corsicans in his service, and if he does not threaten your life they will.'

'Ginevra,' he said, 'and must this hatred exist between us?'

She smiled sadly and bowed her head. But she soon raised it again with a sort of pride, and said, 'Oh, Luigi, our feelings must be very pure and true that I should have the strength to walk in the path I am entering on. But it is for the sake of happiness which will last as long as life, is it not?'

Luigi answered only with a smile, and pressed her hand. The girl understood that only a great love could at such a moment scorn mere protestations. This calm and conscientious expression of Luigi's feelings seemed to speak for their strength and permanence. The fate of the couple was thus sealed. Ginevra foresaw many painful contests to be fought out, but the idea of deserting Louis—an idea which had perhaps floated before her mind—at once vanished. His, henceforth and for ever, she suddenly dragged him away and out of the house with a sort of violence, and did not quit him till they reached the house where Servin had taken a humble lodging for him.

When she returned to her father's house she had assumed the serenity which comes of a strong resolve. No change of manner revealed any uneasiness. She found her parents ready to sit down to dinner, and she looked at them with eyes devoid of defiance, and full of sweetness. She saw that her old mother had been weeping; at the sight of her red eyelids for a moment her heart failed her, but she hid her emotion. Piombo seemed to be a prey to anguish too keen, too concentrated to be shown by ordinary means of expression. The servants waited on a meal which no one ate. A horror of food is one of the symptoms indicative of a great crisis of the soul. All three rose without any one of them having spoken a word. When Ginevra was seated in the great, solemn drawing-room, between her father and mother, Piombo tried to speak, but he found no voice; he tried to walk about, but found no strength; he sat down again and rang the bell.

'Pietro,' said he to the servant at last, 'light the fire, I am cold.'

Ginevra was shocked, and looked anxiously at her father. The struggle he was going through must be frightful; his face looked quite changed. Ginevra knew the extent of the danger that threatened her, but she did

not tremble; while the glances that Bartolomeo cast at his daughter seemed to proclaim that he was at this moment in fear of the character whose violence was his own work. Between these two everything must be in excess. And the certainty of the possible change of feeling between the father and daughter filled the Baroness's face with an expression of terror.

'Ginevra, you love the enemy of your family,' said Piombo at last, not daring to look at his daughter.

'That is true,' she replied.

'You must choose between him and us. Our Vendetta is part of ourselves. If you do not espouse my cause, you are not of my family.'

'My choice is made,' said Ginevra, in a steady voice.

His daughter's calmness misled Bartolomeo.

'Oh, my dear daughter!' cried the old man, whose eyelids were moist with tears, the first, the only tears he ever shed in his life.

'I shall be his wife,' she said abruptly.

Bartolomeo could not see for a moment; but he recovered himself and replied, 'This marriage shall never be so long as I live. I will never consent.' Ginevra kept silence. 'But, do you understand,' the Baron went on, 'that Luigi is the son of the man who killed your brothers?'

'He was six years old when the crime was committed; he must be innocent of it,' she answered.

'A Porta!' cried Bartolomeo.

'But how could I share this hatred,' said the girl eagerly. 'Did you bring me up in the belief that a Porta was a monster? Could I imagine that even one was left of those you had killed? Is it not in nature that you should make your Vendetta give way to my feelings?'

'A Porta!' repeated Piombo. 'If his father had found you then in your bed, you would not be alive now. He would have dealt you a hundred deaths.'

'Possibly,' she said. 'But his son has given me more than life. To see Luigi is a happiness without which I

cannot live. Luigi has revealed to me the world of feeling. I have, perhaps, seen even handsomer faces than his, but none ever charmed me so much. I have, perhaps, heard voices—no, no, never one so musical! Luigi loves me. He shall be my husband.'

'Never!' said Piombo. 'Ginevra, I would sooner see you in your coffin!'

The old man rose, and paced the room with hurried strides, uttering fierce words, with pauses between that betrayed all his indignation.

'You think, perhaps, that you can bend my will? Undeceive yourself. I will not have a Porta for my son-in-law. That is my decision. Never speak of the matter again. I am Bartolomeo di Piombo, do you hear, Ginevra?'

'Do you attach any mysterious meaning to the words?' she coldly asked.

'They mean that I have a dagger, and that I do not fear the justice of men. We Corsicans settle such matters with God.'

'Well,' said the girl, 'I am Ginevra di Piombo, and I declare that in six months I will be Luigi Porta's wife.—You are a tyrant, father,' she added, after an ominous pause.

Bartolomeo clenched his fists, and struck the marble chimney shelf.

'Ah! we are in Paris!' he muttered.

He said no more, but folded his arms and bowed his head on his breast; nor did he say another word the whole evening. Having asserted her will, the girl affected the most complete indifference; she sat down to the piano, sang, played the most charming music, with a grace and feeling that proclaimed her perfect freedom of mind, triumphing over her father, whose brow showed no relenting. The old man deeply felt this tacit insult, and at that moment gathered the bitter fruits of the education he had given his daughter. Respect is a barrier which

protects the parents and the children alike, sparing those much sorrow, and these remorse.

The next day, as Ginevra was going out at the hour when she usually went to the studio, she found the door of the house closed upon her; but she soon devised means for informing Luigi Porta of her father's severity. A waiting woman, who could not read, carried to the young officer a letter written by Ginevra. For five days the lovers contrived to correspond, thanks to the plots that young people of twenty can always contrive.

The father and daughter rarely spoke to each other. Both had in the bottom of their hearts an element of hatred; they suffered, but in pride and silence. Knowing well how strong were the bonds of love that tied them to each other, they tried to wrench them asunder, but without success. No sweet emotion ever came, as it had been wont, to give light to Bartolomeo's severe features when he gazed at his Ginevra, and there was something savage in her expression when she looked at her father. Reproach sat on her innocent brow; she gave herself up, indeed, to thoughts of happiness, but remorse sometimes dimmed her eyes. It was not, indeed, difficult to divine that she would never enjoy in peace a felicity which made her parents unhappy. In Bartolomeo, as in his daughter, all the irresolution arising from their native goodness of heart was doomed to shipwreck on their fierce pride and the revengeful spirit peculiar to Corsicans. They encouraged each other in their wrath, and shut their eyes to the future. Perhaps, too, each fancied that the other would yield.

On Ginevra's birthday, her mother, heart-broken at this disunion, which was assuming a serious aspect, planned to reconcile the father and daughter by an appeal to the memories of this anniversary. They were all three sitting in Bartolomeo's room. Ginevra guessed her mother's purpose from the hesitation written in her face, and she smiled sadly. At this instant a servant announced two

lawyers, accompanied by several witnesses, who all came into the room. Bartolomeo stared at the men, whose cold, set faces were in themselves an insult to souls so fevered as those of the three principal actors in this scene. The old man turned uneasily to his daughter, and saw on her face a smile of triumph which led him to suspect some catastrophe; but he affected, as savages do, to preserve a deceitful rigidity, while he looked at the two lawyers with a sort of apathetic curiosity. At a gesture of invitation from the old man the visitors took seats.

'Monsieur is no doubt Baron di Piombo?' said the elder of the two lawyers.

Bartolomeo bowed. The lawyer gave his head a little jerk, looked at Ginevra with the sly expression of a bailiff nabbing a debtor; then he took out his snuff-box, opened it, and, taking a pinch of snuff, absorbed it in little sniffs while considering the opening words of his discourse; and while pronouncing them he made constant pauses, an oratorical effect which a dash in printing represents very imperfectly.

'Monsieur,' said he, 'I am Monsieur Roguin, notary to Mademoiselle, your daughter, and we are here—my colleague and I—to carry out the requirements of the law, and—to put an end to the divisions which—as it would seem—have arisen—between you and Mademoiselle, your daughter—on the question—of—her—marriage with Monsieur Luigi Porta.' This speech, made in a pedantic style, seemed, no doubt, to Monsieur Roguin much too fine to be understood all in a moment, and he stopped, while looking at Bartolomeo with an expression peculiar to men of business, and which is half-way between servility and familiarity. Lawyers are so much used to feign interest in the persons to whom they speak that their features at last assume a grimace which they can put on and off with their official *pallium*. This caricature of friendliness, so mechanical as to be easily detected, irritated Bartolomeo to such a pitch that it took all his self-

control not to throw Monsieur Roguin out of the window; a look of fury emphasised his wrinkles, and on seeing this the notary said to himself: 'I am making an effect.'

'But,' he went on in a honeyed voice, 'Monsieur le Baron, on such occasions as these, our intervention must always, at first, be essentially conciliatory.—Have the kindness to listen to me.—It is in evidence that Mademoiselle Ginevra Piombo—has to-day—attained the age at which, after a "respectful summons," she may proceed to the solemnisation of her marriage—notwithstanding that her parents refuse their consent. Now—it is customary in families—which enjoy a certain consideration—which move in society—and preserve their dignity—people, in short, to whom it is important not to let the public into the secret of their differences—and who also do not wish to do themselves an injury by blighting the future lives of a young husband and wife—for that is doing themselves an injury. It is the custom, I was saying—in such highly respectable families—not to allow the serving of such a summons—which must be—which always is a record of a dispute—which at last ceases to exist. For as soon, Monsieur, as a young lady has recourse to a "respectful summons" she proclaims a determination so obstinate—that her father—and her mother—' he added, turning to the Baroness, 'can have no further hope of seeing her follow their advice.—Hence the parental prohibition being nullified—in the first place by this fact—and also by the decision of the law—it is always the case that a wise father, after finally remonstrating with his child, allows her the liberty—'

Monsieur Roguin paused, perceiving that he might talk on for two hours without extracting an answer; and he also felt a peculiar agitation as he looked at the man he was trying to convince. An extraordinary change had come over Bartolomeo's countenance. All its lines were set, giving him an expression of indescribable cruelty, and he glared at the lawyer like a tiger. The Baroness sat

mute and passive. Ginevra, calm and resolute, was waiting; she knew that the notary's voice was stronger than hers, and she seemed to have made up her mind to keep silence. At the moment when Roguin ceased speaking, the scene was so terrible that the witnesses, as strangers, trembled; never, perhaps, had such a silence weighed on them. The lawyers looked at each other as if in consultation, then they rose and went to the window.

'Did you ever come across clients made to this pattern?' asked Roguin of his colleague.

'There is nothing to be got out of him,' said the younger man. 'In your place I should read the summons and nothing more. The old man is no joke; he is choleric, and you will gain nothing by trying to discuss matters with him.'

Monsieur Roguin therefore read aloud from a sheet of stamped paper a summons ready drawn up, and coldly asked Bartolomeo what his reply was.

'Are there laws in France then that upset a father's authority?' asked the Corsican.

'Monsieur——' said Roguin, smoothly.

'That snatch a child from her father?'

'Monsieur——'

'That rob an old man of his last consolation?'

'Monsieur, your daughter belongs to you only so long——'

'That kill her?'

'Monsieur, allow me.'

There is nothing more hideous than the cold-blooded and close reasoning of a lawyer in the midst of such scenes of passion as they are usually mixed up with. The faces which Piombo saw seemed to him to have escaped from Hell; his cold and concentrated rage knew no bounds at the moment when his little opponent's calm and almost piping voice uttered that fatal, 'Allow me.' He sprang at a long dagger which hung from a nail over the chimney-piece, and rushed at his daughter. The younger of the

two lawyers and one of the witnesses threw themselves between him and Ginevra; but Bartolomeo brutally knocked them over, showing them a face of fire and glowing eyes which seemed more terrible than the flash of the dagger. When Ginevra found herself face to face with her father she looked at him steadily with a glance of triumph, went slowly towards him, and knelt down.

'No, no! I cannot!' he exclaimed, flinging away the weapon with such force that it stuck fast in the wainscoat.

'Mercy, then, mercy!' said she. 'You hesitate to kill me, but you refuse me life. Oh, father, I never loved you so well—but give me Luigi. I ask your consent on my knees; a daughter may humble herself to her father. My Luigi, or I must die!'

The violent excitement that choked her prevented her saying more; she found no voice; her convulsive efforts plainly showed that she was between life and death. Bartolomeo roughly pushed her away.

'Go,' he said, 'the wife of Luigi Porta cannot be a Piombo. I no longer have a daughter! I cannot bring myself to curse you, but I give you up. You have now no father. My Ginevra Piombo is buried then!' he exclaimed in a deep tone, as he clutched at his heart.—'Go, I say, wretched girl,' he went on after a moment's silence. 'Go, and never let me see you again.'

He took Ginevra by the arm, and in silence led her out of the house.

'Luigi!' cried Ginevra, as she went into the humble room where the officer was lodged, 'my Luigi, we have no fortune but our love.'

'We are richer than all the kings of the earth,' he replied.

'My father and mother have cast me out,' said she with deep melancholy.

'I will love you for them.'

'Shall we be very happy?' she cried, with a gaiety that had something terrible in it.

'And for ever!' he answered, clasping her to his heart.

On the day following that on which Ginevra had quitted her father's house, she went to beg Madame Servin to grant her protection and shelter till the time, fixed by law, when she could be married to Luigi. There began her apprenticeship to the troubles which the world strews in the way of those who do not obey its rules. Madame Servin, who was greatly distressed at the injury that Ginevra's adventure had done the painter, received the fugitive coldly, and explained to her with circumspect politeness that she was not to count on her support. Too proud to insist, but amazed at such selfishness, to which she was unaccustomed, the young Corsican went to lodge in a furnished house as near as possible to Luigi's. The son of the Portas spent all his days at the feet of his beloved; his youthful love, and the purity of his mind, dispersed the clouds which her father's reprobation had settled on the banished daughter's brow; and he painted the future as so fair that she ended by smiling, though she could not forget her parents' severity.

One morning the maid of the house brought up to her several trunks containing dress-stuffs, linen, and a quantity of things needful for a young woman settling for the first time. In this she recognised the foreseeing kindness of a mother; for as she examined these gifts, she found a purse into which the Baroness had put some money belonging to Ginevra, adding all her own savings. With the money was a letter, in which she implored her daughter to give up her fatal purpose of marrying, if there were yet time. She had been obliged, she said, to take unheard-of precautions to get this small assistance conveyed to Ginevra; she begged her not to accuse her of hardness if henceforth she left her neglected; she feared she could do no more for her; she blessed her, hoped she might find happiness in this fatal marriage if she persisted, and assured her that her one thought was of her beloved

daughter. At this point tears had blotted out many words of the letter.

'Oh, mother!' cried Ginevra, quite overcome.

She felt a longing to throw herself at her mother's feet, to see her, to breathe the blessed air of home; she was on the point of rushing off when Luigi came in. She looked at him, and filial affection vanished, her tears were dried, she could not find it in her to leave the unhappy and loving youth. To be the sole hope of a noble soul, to love and to desert it—such a sacrifice is treason of which no young heart is capable. Ginevra had the generosity to bury her grief at the bottom of her soul.

At last the day of their wedding came. Ginevra found no one near her. Luigi took advantage of the moment when she was dressing to go in search of the necessary witnesses to their marriage act. These were very good people. One of them, an old quartermaster of hussars, had, when in the army, found himself under such obligations to Luigi as an honest man never forgets; he had become a job-master, and had several hackney carriages. The other, a builder, was the proprietor of the house where the young couple were to lodge. Each of these brought a friend, and all four came with Luigi to fetch the bride. Unaccustomed as they were to social grimacing, seeing nothing extraordinary in the service they were doing to Luigi, these men were decently but quite plainly dressed, and there was nothing to proclaim the gay escort of a wedding. Ginevra herself was very simply clad, to be in keeping with her fortune; but, nevertheless, there was something so noble and impressive in her beauty that at the sight of her the words died on the lips of the good folks who had been prepared to pay her some compliment; they bowed respectfully, and she bowed in return; they looked at her in silence, and could only admire her. Joy can only express itself among equals. So, as fate would have it, all was gloomy and serious around the lovers; there was nothing to reflect their happiness.

The church and the mairie were not far away. The two Corsicans, followed by the four witnesses required by law, decided to go on foot, with a simplicity which robbed this great event of social life of all parade. In the court-yard of the mairie they found a crowd of carriages, which announced a numerous party within. They went up-stairs and entered a large room, where the couples who were to be made happy on this particular day were awaiting the *Maire* of that quarter of Paris with considerable impatience. Ginevra sat down by Luigi on the end of a long bench, and their witnesses remained standing for lack of seats. Two brides, pompously arrayed in white, loaded with ribbons and lace and pearls, and crowned with bunches of orange-blossom of which the sheeny buds quivered under their veils, were surrounded by their families and accompanied by their mothers, to whom they turned with looks at once timid and satisfied; every eye reflected their happiness, and every face seemed to exhale benedictions. Fathers, witnesses, brothers, and sisters were coming and going like a swarm of insects playing in a sunbeam which soon must vanish. Every-one seemed to understand the preciousness of this brief hour in life when the heart stands poised between two hopes—the wishes of the past, the promise of the future.

At this sight Ginevra felt her heart swell, and she pressed Luigi's arm. He gave her a look, and a tear rose to the young man's eye; he never saw more clearly than at that moment all that his Ginevra had sacrificed for him. That rare tear made the young girl forget the forlorn position in which she stood. Love poured treasures of light between the lovers, who from that moment saw nothing but each other in the midst of the confusion.

Their witnesses, indifferent to the ceremonial, were quietly discussing business matters.

'Oats are very dear,' said the quartermaster to the mason.

'They have not yet gone up so high as plaster in pro-

portion,' said the builder. And they walked round the large room.

'What a lot of time we are losing here!' exclaimed the mason, putting a huge silver watch back into his pocket.

Luigi and Ginevra, clinging to each other, seemed to be but one person. A poet would certainly have admired these two heads, full of the same feeling, alike in colouring, melancholy and silent in the presence of the two buzzing wedding-parties, of four excited families sparkling with diamonds and flowers, and full of gaiety which seemed a mere effervescence. All the joys of which these loud and gorgeous groups made a display, Luigi and Ginevra kept buried at the bottom of their hearts. On one side was the coarse clamour of pleasure; on the other the delicate silence of happy souls: earth and heaven.

But Ginevra trembled, and could not altogether shake off her woman's weakness. Superstitious, as Italians are, she regarded this contrast as an omen, and in the depths of her heart she harboured a feeling of dread, as unconquerable as her love itself.

Suddenly an official in livery threw open the double doors; silence fell, and his voice sounded like a yelp as he called out the names of Monsieur Luigi Porta and Mademoiselle Ginevra Piombo. This incident caused the pair some embarrassment. The celebrity of the name of Piombo attracted attention; the spectators looked about them for a wedding-party which must surely be a splendid one. Ginevra rose; her eyes, thunderous with pride, subdued the crowd, she took Luigi's arm, and went forward with a firm step, followed by the witnesses. A murmur of astonishment which rapidly grew louder, and whispering on all sides, reminded Ginevra that the world was calling her to account for her parents' absence. Her father's curse seemed to be pursuing her.

'Wait for the families of the bride and bridegroom,'

said the Maire to the clerk, who at once began to read the contracts.

'The father and mother enter a protest,' said the clerk indifferently.

'On both sides?' asked the Maire.

'The man is an orphan.'

'Where are the witnesses?'

'They are here,' said the clerk, pointing to the four motionless and silent men who stood like statues, with their arms crossed.

'But if the parents protest——?' said the Maire.

'The "respectful summons" has been presented in due form,' replied the man, rising to place the various documents in the functionary's hands.

This discussion in an office seemed to brand them, and in a few words told a whole history. The hatred of the Porta and the Piombo, all these terrible passions, were thus recorded on a page of a register, as the annals of a nation may be inscribed on a tombstone in a few lines, nay, even in a single name: Robespierre or Napoleon. Ginevra was trembling. Like the dove crossing the waters, which had no rest for her foot but in the ark, her eyes could take refuge only in Luigi's, for all else was cold and sad. The Maire had a stern, disapproving look, and his clerk stared at the couple with ill-natured curiosity. Nothing ever had less the appearance of a festivity. Like all the other events of human life when they are stripped of their accessories, it was a simple thing in itself, immense in its idea.

After some questions, to which they replied, the Maire muttered a few words, and then, having signed their names in the register, Luigi and Ginevra were man and wife. The young Corsicans, whose union had all the poetry which genius has consecrated in Romeo and Juliet, went away between two lines of jubilant relations to whom they did not belong, and who were out of patience at the delay caused by a marriage apparently so

forlorn. When the girl found herself in the courtyard and under the open sky, a deep sigh broke from her very heart.

'Oh, will a whole life of love and devotion suffice to repay my Ginevra for her courage and tenderness?' said Luigi.

At these words, spoken with tears of joy, the bride forgot all her suffering, for she had suffered in showing herself to the world claiming a happiness which her parents refused to sanction.

'Why do men try to come between us?' she said, with a simplicity of feeling that enchanted Luigi.

Gladness made them more light-hearted. They saw neither the sky, nor the earth, nor the houses, and flew on wings to the church. At last they found themselves in a small, dark chapel, and in front of a humble altar where an old priest married them. There, as at the Mairie, they were pursued by the two weddings that persecuted them with their splendour. The church, filled with friends and relations, rang with the noise made by carriages, beadles, porters, and priests. Altars glittered with ecclesiastical magnificence; the crowns of orange-blossom that decked the statues of the Virgin seemed quite new. Nothing was to be seen but flowers, with perfumes, gleaming tapers, and velvet cushions embroidered with gold. God seemed to have a share in this rapture of a day.

When the symbol of eternal union was to be held above the heads of Luigi and Ginevra—the yoke of white satin which for some is so soft, so bright, so light, and for the greater number is made of lead—the priest looked round in vain for two young boys to fill the happy office; two of the witnesses took their place. The priest gave the couple a hasty discourse on the dangers of life, and on the duties they must one day inculcate in their children, and he here took occasion to insinuate a reflection on the absence of Ginevra's parents; then having united them

in the presence of God, as the Maire had united them in the presence of the Law, he ended the mass, and left them.

'God bless them,' said Vergniaud to the mason at the church door. 'Never were two creatures better made for each other. That girl's parents are wretches. I know no braver soldier than Colonel Luigi! If all the world had behaved as he did, *L'autre** would still be with us.'

The soldier's blessing, the only one breathed for them this day, fell like balm on Ginevra's heart.

They all parted with shaking of hands, and Luigi cordially thanked his landlord.

'Good-bye, old fellow,' said Luigi to the quarter-master. 'And thank you.'

'At your service, Colonel, soul and body, horses and chaises—all that is mine is yours.'

'How well he loves you!' said Ginevra.

Luigi eagerly led his wife home to the house they were to live in; they soon reached the modest apartment, and there, when the door was closed, Luigi took her in his arms, exclaiming, 'Oh, my Ginevra—for you are mine now—here is our real festival! Here,' he went on, 'all will smile on us.'

Together they went through the three rooms which composed their dwelling. The entrance hall served as drawing-room and dining-room. To the right was a bedroom, to the left a sort of large closet which Luigi had arranged for his beloved wife, where she found easels, her paint-box, some casts, models, lay figures, pictures, portfolios, in short, all the apparatus of an artist.

'Here I shall work,' said she, with childlike glee.

She looked for a long time at the paper and the furniture, constantly turning to Luigi to thank him, for there was a kind of magnificence in this humble retreat; a bookcase contained Ginevra's favourite books, and there was a piano. She sat down on an ottoman, drew Luigi

* Napoleon.

to her side, and clasping his hand, 'You have such good taste,' said she, in a caressing tone.

'Your words make me very happy,' he replied.

'But, come, let us see everything,' said Ginevra, from whom Luigi had kept the secret of this little home.

They went into a bridal chamber that was as fresh and white as a maiden.

'Oh! come away,' said Luigi, laughing.

'But I must see everything,' and Ginevra imperiously went on, examining all the furniture with the curiosity of an antiquary studying a medal. She touched the silk stuff and scrutinised everything with the childlike delight of a bride turning over the treasures of the *corbeille* brought her by her husband.

'We have begun by ruining ourselves,' she said in a half-glad, half-regretful tone.

'It is true; all my arrears of pay are there,' replied Luigi. 'I sold it to a good fellow named Gigonnet.'

'Why?' she asked, in a reproachful voice, which betrayed, however, a secret satisfaction. 'Do you think I should be less happy under a bare roof? Still,' she went on, 'it is all very pretty, and it is ours!'

Luigi looked at her with such enthusiasm that she cast down her eyes, and said, 'Let us see the rest.'

Above these three rooms, in the attics, were a work-room for Luigi, a kitchen, and a servant's room. Ginevra was content with her little domain, though the view was limited by the high wall of a neighbouring house, and the courtyard on which the rooms looked was gloomy. But the lovers were so glad of heart, hope so beautified the future, that they would see nothing but enchantment in their mysterious dwelling. They were buried in this huge house, lost in the immensity of Paris, like two pearls in their shell, in the bosom of the deep sea. For any one else it would have been a prison; to them it was Paradise.

The first days of their married life were given to love;

it was too difficult for them to devote themselves at once to work, and they could not resist the fascination of their mutual passion. Luigi would recline for hours at his wife's feet, admiring the colour of her hair, the shape of her forehead, the exquisite setting of her eyes, the purity and whiteness of the arched brow beneath which they slowly rose or fell, expressing the happiness of satisfied love. Ginevra stroked her Luigi's locks, never tiring of gazing at what she called, in one of her own phrases, the *beltà folgorante* of the young man, and his delicately cut features; always fascinated by the dignity of his manners, while always charming him by the grace of her own. They played like children with the merest trifles, these trifles always brought them back to their passion, and they ceased playing only to lapse into the day dreams of *far niente*. An air sung by Ginevra would reproduce for them the exquisite hues of their love.

Or, matching their steps as they had matched their souls, they wandered about the country, finding their love in everything, in the flowers, in the sky, in the heart of the fiery glow of the setting sun; they read it even in the changing clouds that were tossed on the winds. No day was ever like the last, their love continued to grow because it was true. In a very few days they had proved each other, and had instinctively perceived that their souls were of such a temper that their inexhaustible riches seemed to promise ever new joys for the future. This was love in all its fresh candour, with its endless prattle, its unfinished sentences, its long silences, its Oriental restfulness and ardour. Luigi and Ginevra had wholly understood love. Is not love like the sea, which, seen superficially or in haste, is accused of monotony by vulgar minds, while certain privileged beings can spend all their life admiring it and finding in it changeful phenomena which delight them?

One day, however, prudence dragged the young couple from their Garden of Eden; they must work for their

living. Ginevra, who had a remarkable talent for copying pictures, set to work to produce copies, and formed a connection among dealers. Luigi, too, eagerly sought some occupation; but it was difficult for a young officer, whose talents were limited to a thorough knowledge of tactics, to find any employment in Paris. At last, one day when, weary of his vain efforts, he felt despair in his soul at seeing that the whole burthen of providing for their existence rested on Ginevra, it occurred to him that he might earn something by his handwriting, which was beautiful. With a perseverance, of which his wife had set the example, he went to ask work of the attorneys, the notaries, and the pleaders of Paris. The frankness of his manners and his painful situation greatly interested people in his favour, and he got enough copying to be obliged to employ youths under him. Presently he took work on a larger scale. The income derived from this office-work and the price of Ginevra's paintings put the young household on a footing of comfort, which they were proud of as the fruit of their own industry.

This was the sunniest period of their life. The days glided swiftly by between work and the happiness of love. In the evening after working hard they found themselves happy in Ginevra's cell. Music then consoled them for their fatigues. No shade of melancholy ever clouded the young's wife's features, and she never allowed herself to utter a lament. She could always appear to her Luigi with a smile on her lips and a light in her eyes. Each cherished a ruling thought which would have made them take pleasure in the hardest toil: Ginevra told herself she was working for Luigi, and Luigi for Ginevra. Sometimes, in her husband's absence, the young wife would think of the perfect joy it would have been if this life of love might have been spent in the sight of her father and mother; then she would sink into deep melancholy, and feel all the pangs of remorse; dark pictures would pass like shadows before her fancy; she would see

her old father alone, or her mother weeping in the evenings, and hiding her tears from the inexorable Piombo. Those two grave, white heads would suddenly rise up before her, and she fancied she would never see them again but in the fantastical light of memory. This idea haunted her like a presentiment.

She kept the anniversary of their wedding by giving her husband a portrait he had often wished for—that of his Ginevra. The young artist had never executed so remarkable a work. Apart from the likeness, which was perfect, the brilliancy of her beauty, the purity of her feelings, the happiness of love, were rendered with a kind of magic. The masterpiece was hung up with due ceremony.

They spent another year in the midst of comfort. The history of their life can be told in these words: 'They were happy.' No event occurred deserving to be related.

At the beginning of the winter of 1819 the picture-dealers advised Ginevra to bring them something else than copies, as, in consequence of the great competition, they could no longer sell them to advantage. Madame Porta acknowledged the mistake she had made in not busying herself with genre pictures which would have won her a name; she undertook to paint portraits; but she had to contend against a crowd of artists even poorer than herself. However, as Luigi and Ginevra had saved some money, they did not despair of the future. At the end of this same winter Luigi was working without ceasing. He, too, had to compete with rivals; the price of copying had fallen so low that he could no longer employ assistants, and was compelled to give up more time to his labour to earn the same amount. His wife had painted several pictures which were not devoid of merit, but dealers were scarcely buying even those of artists of repute. Ginevra offered them for almost nothing, and could not sell them.

The situation of the household was something terrible;

the souls of the husband and wife floated in happiness, love loaded them with its treasures; poverty rose up like a skeleton in the midst of this harvest of joys, and they hid their alarms from each other. When Ginevra felt herself on the verge of tears as she saw Luigi suffering, she heaped caresses on him; Luigi, in the same way, hid the blackest care in his heart, while expressing the fondest devotion to Ginevra. They sought some compensation for their woes in the enthusiasm of their feelings, and their words, their joys, their playfulness, were marked by a kind of frenzy. They were alarmed at the future. What sentiment is there to compare in strength with a passion which must end to-morrow—killed by death or necessity? When they spoke of their poverty, they felt the need of deluding each other, and snatched at the smallest hope with equal eagerness.

One night Ginevra sought in vain for Luigi at her side, and got up quite frightened. A pale gleam reflected from the dingy wall of the little courtyard led her to guess that her husband sat up to work at night. Luigi waited till his wife was asleep to go up to his workroom. The clock struck four. Ginevra went back to bed and feigned sleep; Luigi came back, overwhelmed by fatigue and want of sleep, and Ginevra gazed sadly at the handsome face on which labour and anxiety had already traced some lines.

'And it is for me that he spends the night in writing,' she thought, and she wept.

An idea came to dry her tears: she would imitate Luigi. That same day she went to a rich print-seller, and by the help of a letter of recommendation to him that she had obtained from Elie Magus, a picture-dealer, she got some work in colouring prints. All day she painted and attended to her household cares, then at night she coloured prints. These two beings, so tenderly in love, got into bed only to get out of it again. Each pretended to sleep, and out of devotion to the other stole away as

soon as one had deceived the other. One night Luigi, knocked over by a sort of fever caused by work, of which the burthen was beginning to crush him, threw open the window of his workroom to inhale the fresh morning air, and shake off his pain, when, happening to look down, he saw the light thrown on the wall by Ginevra's lamp; the unhappy man guessed the truth; he went downstairs, walking softly, and discovered his wife in her studio colouring prints.

'Oh, Ginevra,' he exclaimed.

She started convulsively in her chair, and turned scarlet.

'Could I sleep while you were wearing yourself out with work?' said she.

'But I alone have a right to work so hard.'

'And can I sit idle?' replied the young wife, whose eyes filled with tears, 'when I know that every morsel of bread almost costs us a drop of your blood? I should die if I did not add my efforts to yours. Ought we not to have everything in common, pleasures and pains?'

'She is cold!' cried Luigi, in despair. 'Wrap your shawl closer over your chest, my Ginevra, the night is damp and chilly.'

They went to the window, the young wife leaning her head on her beloved husband's shoulder, he with his arm round her, sunk in deep silence, and watching the sky which dawn was slowly lighting up.

Grey clouds swept across in quick succession, and the east grew brighter by degrees.

'See,' said Ginevra, 'it is a promise — we shall be happy.'

'Yes, in Heaven!' replied Luigi, with a bitter smile. 'Oh, Ginevra! you who deserved all the riches of earth . . .'

'I have your heart!' said she in a glad tone.

'Ah, and I do not complain,' he went on, clasping her closely to him. And he covered the delicate face with kisses; it was already beginning to lose the freshness of

youth, but the expression was so tender and sweet that he could never look at it without feeling comforted.

'How still!' said Ginevra. 'I enjoy sitting late, my dearest. The majesty of night is really contagious; it is impressive, inspiring; there is something strangely solemn in the thought: all sleeps, but I am awake.'

'Oh, my Ginevra, I feel, not for the first time, the refined grace of your soul—but, see, this is daybreak, come and sleep.'

'Yes,' said she, 'if I am not the only one to sleep. I was miserable indeed the night when I discovered that my Luigi was awake and at work without me.'

The valour with which the young people defied misfortune for some time found a reward. But the event which usually crowns the joys of a household was destined to be fatal to them. Ginevra gave birth to a boy who, to use a common phrase, was as beautiful as the day. The feeling of motherhood doubled the young creature's strength. Luigi borrowed money to defray the expenses of her confinement. Thus, just at first, she did not feel all the painfulness of their situation, and the young parents gave themselves up to the joy of rearing a child. This was their last gleam of happiness. Like two swimmers who unite their forces to stem a current, the Corsicans at first struggled bravely; but sometimes they gave themselves up to an apathy resembling the torpor that precedes death, and they soon were obliged to sell their little treasures.

Poverty suddenly stood before them, not hideous, but humbly attired, almost pleasant to endure; there was nothing appalling in her voice; she did not bring despair with her, nor spectres, nor squalor, but she made them forget the traditions and the habit of comfort; she broke the mainsprings of pride. Then came misery in all its horror, reckless of her rags, and trampling every human feeling under foot. Seven or eight months after the birth of little Bartolomeo it would have been difficult to

recognise the original of the beautiful portrait, the sole adornment of their bare room, in the mother who was suckling a sickly baby. Without any fire in bitter winter weather, Ginevra saw the soft outlines of her face gradually disappear, her cheeks became as white as porcelain, her eyes colourless, as though the springs of life were drying up in her. And watching her starved and pallid infant, she suffered only in his young misery, while Luigi had not the heart even to smile at his boy.

'I have scoured Paris,' he said in a hollow voice. 'I know no one, and how can I dare beg of strangers? Vergniaud, the horse-breeder, my old comrade in Egypt, is implicated in some conspiracy, and has been sent to prison; besides, he had lent me all he had to lend. As to the landlord, he has not asked me for any rent for more than a year.'

'But we do not want for anything,' Ginevra gently answered, with an affectation of calmness.

'Each day brings some fresh difficulty,' replied Luigi, with horror.

Luigi took all Ginevra's paintings, the portrait, some furniture which they yet could dispense with, and sold them all for a mere trifle; the money thus obtained prolonged their sufferings for a little while. During these dreadful days Ginevra showed the sublime heights of her character, and the extent of her resignation. She bore the inroads of suffering with stoical firmness. Her vigorous soul upheld her under all ills; with a weak hand she worked on by her dying child, fulfilled her household duties with miraculous activity, and was equal to everything. She was even happy when she saw on Luigi's lips a smile of surprise at the look of neatness she contrived to give to the one room to which they had been reduced.

'I have kept you a piece of bread, dear,' she said one evening when he came in tired.

'And you?'

'I have dined, dear Luigi; I want nothing.' And the sweet expression of her face, even more than her words, urged him to accept the food of which she had deprived herself. Luigi embraced her with one of the despairing kisses which friends gave each other in 1793 as they mounted the scaffold together. In such moments as these two human creatures see each other heart to heart. Thus the unhappy Luigi, understanding at once that his wife was fasting, felt the fever that was undermining her; he shivered, and went out on the pretext of pressing business, for he would rather have taken the most insidious poison than escape death by eating the last morsel of bread in the house.

He wandered about Paris among the smart carriages, in the midst of the insulting luxury that is everywhere flaunted; he hurried past the shops of the money-changers where gold glitters in the window; finally, he determined to sell himself, to offer himself as a substitute for the conscription, hoping by this sacrifice to save Ginevra, and that during his absence she might be taken into favour again by Bartolomeo. So he went in search of one of the men who deal in these white slaves, and felt a gleam of happiness at recognising in him an old officer of the Imperial Guard.

'For two days I have eaten nothing,' he said, in a slow, weak voice. 'My wife is dying of hunger, and never utters a complaint; she will die, I believe, with a smile on her lips. For pity's sake, old comrade,' he added, with a forlorn smile, 'pay for me in advance; I am strong, I have left the service, and I——'

The officer gave Luigi something on account of the sum he promised to get for him. The unhappy man laughed convulsively when he grasped a handful of gold pieces, and ran home as fast as he could go, panting, and exclaiming as he went, 'Oh, my Ginevra—Ginevra!'

It was growing dark by the time he reached home. He went in softly, fearing to over-excite his wife, whom

he had left so weak; the last pale rays of sunshine, coming in at the dormer window, fell on Ginevra's face. She was asleep in her chair with her baby at her breast.

'Wake up, my darling,' said he, without noticing the attitude of the child, which seemed at this moment to have a supernatural glory.

On hearing his voice, the poor mother opened her eyes, met Luigi's look, and smiled; but Luigi gave a cry of terror. He hardly recognised his half-crazed wife, to whom he showed the gold, with a gesture of savage vehemence.

Ginevra began to laugh mechanically, but suddenly she cried in a terrible voice, 'Louis, the child is cold!'

She looked at the infant and fainted. Little Bartolomeo was dead.

Luigi took his wife in his arms, without depriving her of the child, which she clutched to her with incomprehensible strength, and after laying her on the bed he went out to call for help.

'Great Heaven!' he exclaimed to his landlord, whom he met on the stairs, 'I have money, and my child is dead of hunger, and my wife is dying. Help us.'

In despair he went back to his wife, leaving the worthy builder and various neighbours to procure whatever might relieve the misery of which till now they had known nothing, so carefully had the Corsicans concealed it out of a feeling of pride. Luigi had tossed the gold pieces on the floor, and was kneeling by the bed where his wife lay.

'Father, take charge of my son, who bears your name!' cried Ginevra in her delirium.

'Oh, my angel, be calm,' said Luigi, kissing her, 'better days await us!' His voice and embrace restored her to some composure.

'Oh, my Louis,' she went on, looking at him with extraordinary fixity, 'listen to me. I feel that I am dying. My death is quite natural. I have been

suffering too much; and then happiness so great as mine had to be paid for. Yes, my Luigi, be comforted. I have been so happy that if I had to begin life again, I would again accept our lot. I am a bad mother; I weep for you even more than for my child.—My child!' she repeated in a full, deep voice. Two tears dropped from her dying eyes, and she suddenly clasped yet closer the little body she could not warm. 'Give my hair to my father in memory of his Ginevra,' she added. 'Tell him that I never, never, accused him——'

Her head fell back on her husband's arm.

'No, no, you cannot die!' cried Luigi. 'A doctor is coming. We have food. Your father will receive you into favour. Prosperity is dawning on us. Stay with us, angel of beauty!'

But that faithful and loving heart was growing cold. Ginevra instinctively turned her eyes on the man she adored, though she was no longer conscious of anything; confused images rose before her mind, fast losing all memories of earth. She knew that Luigi was there, for she clung more and more tightly to his ice-cold hand, as if to hold herself up above a gulf into which she feared to fall.

'You are cold, dear,' she said presently; 'I will warm you.'

She tried to lay her husband's hand over her heart, but she was dead. Two doctors, a priest, and some neighbours came in at this moment, bringing everything that was needful to save the lives of the young couple and to soothe their despair. At first these intruders made a good deal of noise, but when they were all in the room an appalling silence fell.

While this scene was taking place Bartolomeo and his wife were sitting in their old armchairs, each at one corner of the immense fireplace that warmed the great drawing-room of their mansion. The clock marked

midnight. It was long since the old couple had slept well. At this moment they were silent, like two old folks in their second childhood, who look at everything and see nothing. The deserted room, to them full of memories, was feebly lighted by a single lamp fast dying out. But for the dancing flames on the hearth they would have been in total darkness. One of their friends had just left them, and the chair on which he had sat during his visit stood between the old people. Piombo had already cast more than one glance at this chair, and these glances, fraught with thoughts, followed each other like pangs of remorse, for the empty chair was Ginevra's. Elisa Piombo watched the expressions that passed across her husband's pale face. Though she was accustomed to guess the Corsican's feelings from the violent changes in his features, they were to-night by turns so threatening and so sad that she failed to read this inscrutable soul.

Was Bartolomeo yielding to the overwhelming memories aroused by that chair? Was he pained at perceiving that it had been used by a stranger for the first time since his daughter's departure? Had the hour of mercy, the hour so long and vainly hoped for, struck at last?

These reflections agitated the heart of Elisa Piombo. For a moment her husband's face was so terrible that she quaked at having ventured on so innocent a device to give her an opportunity of speaking of Ginevra. At this instant the northerly blast flung the snowflakes against the shutters with such violence that the old people could hear their soft pelting. Ginevra's mother bent her head to hide her tears from her husband. Suddenly a sigh broke from the old man's heart; his wife looked at him; he was downcast. For the second time in three years she ventured to speak to him of his daughter.

'Supposing Ginevra were cold!' she exclaimed in an undertone. 'Or perhaps she is hungry,' she went on. The Corsican shed a tear. 'She has a child, and cannot

suckle it—her milk is dried up'—the mother added vehemently, with an accent of despair.

'Let her come, oh, let her come!' cried Piombo. 'Oh, my darling child, you have conquered me.'

The mother rose, as if to go to fetch her daughter. At this instant the door was flung open, and a man, whose face had lost all semblance of humanity, suddenly stood before them.

'Dead!—Our families were doomed to exterminate each other; for this is all that remains of her,' he said, laying on the table Ginevra's long, black hair.

The two old people started, as though they had been struck by a thunderbolt; they could not see Luigi.

'He has spared us a pistol shot, for he is dead,' said Bartolomeo deliberately, as he looked on the ground.

PARIS, *January* 1830.

MADAME FIRMIANI

(*To my dear Alexandre de Berny, from his old friend De Balzac.*)

MANY tales, rich in situations, or made dramatic by the endless sport of chance, carry their plot in themselves, and can be related artistically or simply by any lips without the smallest loss of the beauty of the subject; but there are some incidents of human life to which only the accents of the heart can give life; there are certain anatomical details, so to speak, of which the delicacy appears only under the most skilful infusions of mind. Again, there are portraits which demand a soul, and are nothing without the more ethereal features of the responsive countenance. Finally, there are certain things which we know not how to say, or to depict, without I know not what unconceived harmonies that are under the influence of a day or an hour, of a happy conjunction of celestial signs, or of some occult moral predisposition.

Such revelations as these are absolutely required for the telling of this simple story, in which I would fain interest some of those naturally melancholy and pensive souls which are fed on bland emotions. If the writer, like a surgeon by the side of a dying friend, has become imbued with a sort of respect for the subject he is handling, why should not the reader share this inexplicable feeling? Is it so difficult to throw oneself into that vague, nervous melancholy which sheds grey hues on all our surroundings, which is half an illness, though its languid suffering is sometimes a pleasure?

If you are thinking by chance of the dear friends you have lost; if you are alone, and it is night, or the day is dying, read this narrative; otherwise, throw the book aside, here. If you have never buried some kind aunt, an invalid or poor, you will not understand these pages. To some, they will be odorous as of musk; to others, they will be as colourless, as strictly virtuous as those of Florian. In short, the reader must have known the luxury of tears; must have felt the wordless grief of a memory that drifts lightly by, bearing a shade that is dear but remote; he must possess some of those remembrances that make us at the same time regret those whom the earth has swallowed, and smile over vanished joys.

And now the author would have you believe that for all the wealth of England he would not extort from poetry even one of her fictions to add grace to this narrative. This is a true story, on which you may pour out the treasure of your sensibilities, if you have any.

In these days our language has as many dialects as there are men in the great human family. And it is a really curious and interesting thing to listen to the different views or versions of one and the same thing, or event, as given by the various species which make up the monograph of the Parisian—the Parisian being taken as a generic term. Thus you might ask a man of the matter-of-fact type, 'Do you know Madame Firmiani?' and this man would interpret Madame Firmiani by such an inventory as this: 'A large house in the Rue du Bac, rooms handsomely furnished, fine pictures, a hundred thousand francs a year in good securities, and a husband who was formerly receiver-general in the department of Montenotte.' Having thus spoken, your matter-of-fact man—stout and roundabout, almost always dressed in black—draws up his lower lip, so as to cover the upper lip, and nods his head, as much as to say, 'Very respectable people, there is nothing to be said against them'

Ask him no more. Your matter-of-fact people stat everything in figures, dividends, or real estate—a grea word in their dictionary.

Turn to your right, go and question that young man who belongs to the lounger species, and repeat your inquiry 'Madame Firmiani?' says he. 'Yes, yes, I know he very well. I go to her evenings. She receives or Wednesdays; a very good house to know.' Madame Firmiani is already metamorphosed into a house. The house is not a mere mass of stones architecturally put together; no, this word, in the language of the lounger, has no equivalent. And here your lounger, a dry-looking man, with a pleasant smile, saying clever nothings, but always with more acquired wit than natural wit, bends to your ear, and says with a knowing air: 'I never saw Monsieur Firmiani. His social position consists in managing estates in Italy. But Madame Firmiani is French, and spends her income as a Parisian should. She gives excellent tea! It is one of the few houses where you really can amuse yourself, and where everything they give you is exquisite. It is very difficult to get introduced, and the best society is to be seen in her drawing-rooms.' Then the lounger emphasises his last words by gravely taking a pinch of snuff; he applies it to his nose in little dabs, and seems to be saying: 'I go to the house, but do not count on my introducing you.'

To folks of this type Madame Firmiani keeps a sort of inn without a sign.

'Why on earth can you want to go to Madame Firmiani's? It is as dull there as it is at Court. Of what use are brains if they do not keep you out of such drawing-rooms, where, with poetry such as is now current, you hear the most trivial little ballad just hatched out.'

You have asked one of your friends who comes under the class of petty autocrats—men who would like to have the universe under lock and key, and have nothing done

without their leave. They are miserable at other people's enjoyment, can forgive nothing but vice, wrong-doing, and infirmities, and want nothing but protégés. Aristocrats by taste, they are republicans out of spite, simply to discover many inferiors among their equals.

'Oh, Madame Firmiani, my dear fellow, is one of those adorable women whom Nature feels to be a sufficient excuse for all the ugly ones she has created by mistake; she is bewitching, she is kind! I should like to be in power, to be king, to have millions of money, solely (and three words are whispered in your ear). Shall I introduce you to her?'

This young man is a Schoolboy, known for his audacious bearing among men and his extreme shyness in private.

'Madame Firmiani!' cries another, twirling his cane in the air. 'I will tell you what I think of her. She is a woman of between thirty and thirty-five, face a little *passée*, fine eyes, a flat figure, a worn contralto voice, dresses a great deal, rouges a little, manners charming; in short, my dear fellow, the remains of a pretty woman which are still worthy of a passion.'

This verdict is pronounced by a specimen of the genus Coxcomb, who, having just breakfasted, does not weigh his words, and is going out riding. At such moments a coxcomb is pitiless.

'She has a collection of magnificent pictures in her house. Go and see her,' says another; 'nothing can be finer.'

You have come upon the species Amateur. This individual quits you to go to Pérignon's, or to Tripet's. To him Madame Firmiani is a number of painted canvasses.

A Wife.—'Madame Firmiani? I will not have you go there.' This phrase is the most suggestive view of all.—Madame Firmiani! A dangerous woman! A siren! She dresses well, has good taste; she spoils the

night's rest of every wife.—The speaker is of the species Shrew.

An Attaché to an Embassy.—'Madame Firmiani? From Antwerp, is not she? I saw that woman, very handsome, about ten years ago. She was then at Rome.'

Men of the order of Attachés have a mania for utterances à la Talleyrand, their wit is often so subtle that their perception is imperceptible. They are like those billiard players who miss the balls with infinite skill. These men are not generally great talkers; but when they talk it is of nothing less than Spain, Vienna, Italy, or Saint-Petersburg. The names of countries act on them like springs; you press them, and the machinery plays all its tunes.

'Does not that Madame Firmiani see a great deal of the Faubourg Saint-Germain?' This is asked by a person who desires claims to distinction. She adds a *de* to everybody's name—to Monsieur Dupin, senior, to Monsieur Lafayette; she flings it right and left and spatters people with it. She spends her life in anxieties as to what is *correct*; but, for her sins, she lives in the unfashionable Marais, and her husband was an attorney—but an attorney in the King's Court.

'Madame Firmiani, Monsieur? I do not know her.' This man is of the class of Dukes. He recognises no woman who has not been presented. Excuse him; he was created Duke by Napoleon.

'Madame Firmiani? Was she not a singer at the Italian opera house?'—A man of the genus Simpleton. The individuals of this genius must have an answer to everything. They would rather speak calumnies than be silent.

Two old Ladies (*the wives of retired lawyers*). The First (she has a cap with bows of ribbon, her face is wrinkled, her nose sharp; she holds a prayer-book, and her voice is harsh).—'What was her maiden name?—this Madame Firmiani?'

THE SECOND (she has a little red face like a lady-apple, and a gentle voice).—'She was a Cadignan, my dear, niece of the old Prince de Cadignan, and cousin, consequently, to the Duc de Maufrigneuse.'

Madame Firmiani then is a Cadignan. Bereft of virtues, fortune, and youth, she would still be a Cadignan; that, like a prejudice, is always rich and living.

AN ECCENTRIC.—'My dear fellow, I never saw any clogs in her ante-room; you may go to her house without compromising yourself, and play there without hesitation; for if there should be any rogues, they will be people of quality, consequently there is no quarrelling.'

AN OLD MAN OF THE SPECIES OBSERVER.—'You go to Madame Firmiani's, my dear fellow, and you find a handsome woman lounging indolently by the fire. She will scarcely move from her chair; she rises only to greet women, or ambassadors, or dukes—people of importance. She is very gracious, she charms you, she talks well, and likes to talk of everything. She bears every indication of a passionate soul, but she is credited with too many adorers to have a lover. If suspicion rested on only two or three intimate visitors, we might know which was her *cavaliere servente*. But she is all mystery; she is married, and we have never seen her husband; Monsieur Firmiani is purely a creature of fancy, like the third horse we are made to pay for when travelling post, and which we never see; Madame, if you believe the professionals, has the finest contralto voice in Europe, and has not sung three times since she came to Paris; she receives numbers of people, and goes nowhere.'

The Observer speaks as an oracle. His words, his anecdotes, his quotations must all be accepted as truth, or you risk being taken for a man without knowledge of the world, without capabilities. He will slander you lightly in twenty drawing-rooms, where he is as essential as the first piece in the bill—pieces so often played to the benches, but which once upon a time were successful.

The Observer is a man of forty, never dines at home, and professes not to be dangerous to women; he wears powder and a maroon-coloured coat; he can always have a seat in various boxes at the Théâtre des Bouffons. He is sometimes mistaken for a parasite, but he has held too nigh positions to be suspected of sponging, and, indeed, possesses an estate, in a department of which the name has never leaked out.

'Madame Firmiani? Why, my dear boy, she was a mistress of Murat's.' This gentleman is a Contradictory. They supply the errata to every memory, rectify every fact, bet you a hundred to one, are cock-sure of everything. You catch them out in a single evening in flagrant delicts of ubiquity. They assert that they were in Paris at the time of Mallet's conspiracy, forgetting that half an hour before they had crossed the Beresina. The Contradictories are almost all members of the Legion of Honour; they talk very loud, have receding foreheads, and play high.

'Madame Firmiani, a hundred thousand francs a year? Are you mad? Really some people scatter thousands a year with the liberality of authors, to whom it costs nothing to give their heroines handsome fortunes. But Madame Firmiani is a flirt who ruined a young fellow the other day, and hindered him from making a very good marriage. If she were not handsome, she would be penniless.'

This speaker you recognise: he is one of the Envious, and we will not sketch his least feature. The species is as well known as that of the domestic *felis*. How is the perpetuity of envy to be explained? A vice which is wholly unprofitable!

People of fashion, literary people, very good people, and people of every kind were, in the month of January 1824, giving out so many different opinions on Madame Firmiani that it would be tiresome to report them all. We have only aimed at showing that a man wishing to know her, without choosing, or being able, to go to her

house, would have been equally justified in the belief that she was a widow or a wife—silly or witty, virtuous or immoral, rich or poor, gentle or devoid of soul, handsome or ugly; in fact, there were as many Mesdames Firmiani as there are varieties in social life, or sects in the Catholic Church. Frightful thought! We are all like lithographed plates, of which an endless number of copies are taken off by slander. These copies resemble or differ from the original by touches so imperceptibly slight that, but for the calumnies of our friends and the witticisms of newspapers, reputation would depend on the balance struck by each hearer between the limping truth and the lies to which Parisian wit lends wings.

Madame Firmiani, like many other women of dignity and noble pride, who close their hearts as a sanctuary and scorn the world, might have been very hardly judged by Monsieur de Bourbonne, an old gentleman of fortune, who had thought a good deal about her during the past winter. As it happened, this gentleman belonged to the Provincial Land-owner class, folks who are accustomed to inquire into everything, and to make bargains with peasants. In this business a man grows keen-witted in spite of himself, as a soldier, in the long run, acquires the courage of routine. This inquirer, a native of Touraine, and not easily satisfied by the Paris dialects, was a very honourable gentleman who rejoiced in a nephew, his sole heir, for whom he planted his poplars. Their more than natural affection gave rise to much evil-speaking, which individuals of the various species of Tourangeau formulated with much mother wit; but it would be useless to record it; it would pale before that of Parisian tongues. When a man can think of his heir without displeasure, as he sees fine rows of poplars improving every day, his affection increases with each spadeful of earth he turns at the foot of his trees. Though such phenomena of sensibility may be uncommon, they still are to be met with in Touraine.

This much-loved nephew, whose name was Octave de Camps, was descended from the famous Abbé de Camps, so well known to the learned, or to the bibliomaniacs, which is not the same thing.

Provincial folks have a disagreeable habit of regarding young men who sell their reversions with a sort of respectable horror. This Gothic prejudice is bad for speculation, which the Government has hitherto found it necessary to encourage. Now, without consulting his uncle, Octave had on a sudden disposed of an estate in favour of the speculative builders. The château of Villaines would have been demolished but for the offers made by his old uncle to the representatives of the demolishing fraternity. To add to the testator's wrath, a friend of Octave's, a distant relation, one of those cousins with small wealth and great cunning, who lead their prudent neighbours to say, 'I should not like to go to law with him!' had called, by chance, on Monsieur de Bourbonne and informed him that his nephew was ruined. Monsieur Octave de Camps, after dissipating his fortune for a certain Madame Firmiani, and not daring to confess his sins, had been reduced to giving lessons in mathematics, pending his coming into his uncle's leavings. This distant cousin—a sort of Charles Moor—had not been ashamed of giving this disastrous news to the old country gentleman at the hour when, sitting before his spacious hearth, he was digesting a copious provincial dinner. But would-be legatees do not get rid of an uncle so easily as they could wish. This uncle, thanks to his obstinacy, refusing to believe the distant cousin, came out victorious over the indigestion brought on by the biography of his nephew. Some blows fall on the heart, others on the brain; the blow struck by the distant cousin fell on the stomach, and produced little effect, as the good man had a strong one.

Monsieur de Bourbonne, as a worthy disciple of Saint Thomas, came to Paris without telling Octave, and tried to get information as to his heir's insolvency. The old

gentleman, who had friends in the Faubourg Saint Germain—the Listomères, the Lenoncourts, and the Vandenesses—heard so much slander, so much that was true, and so much that was false concerning Madame Firmiani, that he determined to call on her, under the name of Monsieur de Rouxellay, the name of his place. The prudent old man took care, in going to study Octave's mistress—as she was said to be—to choose an evening when he knew that the young man was engaged on work to be well paid for; for Madame Firmiani was always at home to her young friend, a circumstance that no one could account for. As to Octave's ruin, that, unfortunately, was no fiction.

Monsieur de Rouxellay was not at all like a stage uncle. As an old musketeer, a man of the best society, who had his successes in his day, he knew how to introduce himself with a courtly air, remembered the polished manners of the past, had a pretty wit, and understood almost all the roll of nobility. Though he loved the Bourbons with noble frankness, believed in God as gentlemen believe, and read only the *Quotidienne*, he was by no means so ridiculous as the Liberals of his department would have wished. He could hold his own with men about the Court, so long as he was not expected to talk of *Mosè*, or the play, or romanticism, or local colour, or railways. He had not got beyond Monsieur de Voltaire, Monsieur le Comte de Buffon, Peyronnet, and the Chevalier Gluck, the Queen's private musician.

'Madame,' said he to the Marquise de Listomère, to whom he had given his arm to go into Madame Firmiani's room, 'if this woman is my nephew's mistress, I pity her. How can she bear to live in the midst of luxury and know that he is in a garret? Has she no soul? Octave is a fool to have invested the price of the estate of Villaines in the heart of a——'

Monsieur de Bourbonne was of a Fossil species, and spoke only the language of a past day.

'But suppose he had lost it at play?'

'Well, Madame, he would have had the pleasure of playing.'

'You think he has had no pleasure for his money? —Look, here is Madame Firmiani.'

The old uncle's brightest memories paled at the sight of his nephew's supposed mistress. His anger died in a polite speech wrung from him by the presence of Madame Firmiani. By one of these chances which come only to pretty women, it was a moment when all her beauties shone with particular brilliancy, the result, perhaps, of the glitter of waxlights, of an exquisitely simple dress, of an indefinable reflection from the elegance in which she lived and moved. Only long study of the petty revolutions of an evening party in a Paris salon can enable one to appreciate the imperceptible shades that can tinge and change a woman's face. There are moments when, pleased with her dress, feeling herself brilliant, happy at being admired and seeing herself the queen of a room full of remarkable men all smiling at her, a Parisian is conscious of her beauty and grace; she grows the lovelier by all the looks she meets; they give her animation, but their mute homage is transmitted by subtle glances to the man she loves. In such a moment a woman is invested, as it were, with supernatural power, and becomes a witch, an unconscious coquette; she involuntarily inspires the passion which is a secret intoxication to herself, she has smiles and looks that are fascinating. If this excitement which comes from the soul lends attractiveness even to ugly women, with what splendour does it not clothe a naturally elegant creature, finely made, fair, fresh, bright-eyed, and, above all, dressed with such taste as artists and even her most spiteful rivals must admit.

Have you ever met, for your happiness, some woman whose harmonious tones give to her speech the charm that is no less conspicuous in her manners, who knows how to talk and to be silent, who cares for you with

delicate feeling, whose words are happily chosen and her language pure? Her banter flatters you, her criticism does not sting; she neither preaches nor disputes, but is interested in leading a discussion, and stops it at the right moment. Her manner is friendly and gay, her politeness is unforced, her eagerness to please is not servile; she reduces respect to a mere gentle shade; she never tires you, and leaves you satisfied with her and yourself. You will see her gracious presence stamped on the things she collects about her. In her home everything charms the eye, and you breathe, as it seems, your native air. This woman is quite natural. You never feel an effort, she flaunts nothing, her feelings are expressed with simplicity because they are genuine. Though candid, she never wounds the most sensitive pride; she accepts men as God made them, pitying the vicious, forgiving defects and absurdities, sympathising with every age, and vexed with nothing because she has the tact to forefend everything. At once tender and lively, she first constrains and then consoles you. You love her so truly, that if this angel does wrong, you are ready to justify her.—Then you know Madame Firmiani.

By the time old Bourbonne had talked with this woman for a quarter of an hour, sitting by her side, his nephew was absolved. He understood that, true or false, Octave's connection with Madame Firmiani no doubt covered some mystery. Returning to the illusions of his youth, and judging of Madame Firmiani's heart by her beauty, the old gentleman thought that a woman so sure of her dignity as she seemed, was incapable of a base action. Her black eyes spoke of so much peace of mind, the lines of her face were so noble, the forms so pure, and the passion of which she was accused seemed to weigh so little on her heart, that, as he admired all the pledges given to love and to virtue by that adorable countenance, the old man said to himself, 'My nephew has committed some folly.'

Madame Firmiani owned to twenty-five. But the Matter-of-facts could prove that, having been married in 1813 at the age of sixteen, she must be at least eight-and-twenty in 1825. Nevertheless the same persons declared that she had never at any period of her life been so desirable, so perfectly a woman. She had no children, and had never had any; the hypothetical Firmiani, a respectable man of forty in 1813, had, it was said, only his name and fortune to offer her. So Madame Firmiani had come to the age when a Parisian best understands what passion is, and perhaps longs for it innocently in her unemployed hours: she had everything that the world can sell, or lend, or give. The Attachés declared she knew everything, the Contradictories said she had yet many things to learn; the Observers noticed that her hands were very white, her foot very small, her movements a little too undulating; but men of every species envied or disputed Octave's good fortune, agreeing that she was the most aristocratic beauty in Paris.

Still young, rich, a perfect musician, witty, exquisite; welcomed, for the sake of the Cadignans, to whom she was related through her mother, by the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, the oracle of the aristocratic quarter; beloved by her rivals the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse her cousin, the Marquise d'Espard, and Madame de Macumer, she flattered every vanity which feeds or excites love. And, indeed, she was the object of too many desires not to be the victim of fashionable detraction and those delightful calumnies which are wittily hinted behind a fan or in a whispered *aside*. Hence the remarks with which this story opened were necessary to mark the contrast between the real Firmiani and the Firmiani known to the world. Though some women forgave her for being happy, others could not overlook her respectability; now there is nothing so terrible, especially in Paris, as suspicion without foundation; it is impossible to kill it.

This sketch of a personality so admirable by nature

can only give a feeble idea of it; it would need the brush of an Ingres to represent the dignity of the brow, the mass of fine hair, the majesty of the eyes, all the thoughts betrayed by the varying hues of the complexion. There was something of everything in this woman; poets could see in her both Joan of Arc and Agnes Sorel; but there was also the unknown woman—the soul hidden behind this deceptive mask—the soul of Eve, the wealth of evil and the treasures of goodness, wrong and resignation, crime and self-sacrifice—the Doña Julia and Haidee of Byron's *Don Juan*.

The old soldier very boldly remained till the last in Madame Firmiani's drawing-room; she found him quietly seated in an armchair, and staying with the pertinacity of a fly that must be killed to be got rid of. The clock marked two in the morning.

'Madame,' said the old gentleman, just as Madame Firmiani rose in the hope of making her guest understand that it was her pleasure that he should go. 'Madame, I am Monsieur Octave de Camps' uncle.'

Madame Firmiani at once sat down again, and her agitation was evident. In spite of his perspicacity, the planter of poplars could not make up his mind whether shame or pleasure made her turn pale. There are pleasures which do not exist without a little coy bashfulness—delightful emotions which the chastest soul would fain keep behind a veil. The more sensitive a woman is, the more she lives to conceal her soul's greatest joys. Many women, incomprehensible in their exquisite caprices, at times long to hear a name spoken by all the world, while they sometimes would sooner bury it in their hearts. Old Bourbonne did not read Madame Firmiani's agitation quite in this light; but forgive him; the country gentleman was suspicious.

'Indeed, Monsieur?' said Madame Firmiani, with one of those clear and piercing looks in which we men can never see anything, because they question us too keenly.

'Indeed, Madame; and do you know what I have been told—I, in the depths of the country? That my nephew has ruined himself for you; and the unhappy boy is in a garret, while you live here in gold and silks. You will, I hope, forgive my rustic frankness, for it may be useful to you to be informed of the slander.'

'Stop, Monsieur,' said Madame Firmiani, interrupting the gentleman with an imperious gesture, 'I know all that. You are too polite to keep the conversation to this subject when I beg you to change it. You are too gallant, in the old-fashioned sense of the word,' she added, with a slightly ironical emphasis, 'not to acknowledge that you have no right to cross-question me. However, it is ridiculous in me to justify myself. I hope you have a good enough opinion of my character to believe in the utter contempt I feel for money, though I was married without any fortune whatever to a man who had an immense fortune. I do not know whether your nephew is rich or poor; if I have received him, if I still receive him, it is because I regard him as worthy to move in the midst of my friends. All my friends, Monsieur, respect each other; they know that I am not so philosophical as to entertain people whom I do not esteem. That, perhaps, shows a lack of charity; but my guardian angel has preserved in me, to this day, an intense aversion for gossip and dishonour.'

Though her voice was not quite firm at the beginning of this reply, the last words were spoken by Madame Firmiani with the cool decision of *Célimène* rallying the *Misanthrope*.

'Madame,' the Count resumed in a broken voice, 'I am an old man—I am almost a father to Octave—I therefore must humbly crave your pardon beforehand for the only question I shall be so bold as to ask you; and I give you my word of honour as a gentleman that your reply will die here,' and he laid his hand on his heart with a really religious gesture. 'Does gossip speak the truth; do you love Octave?'

'Monsieur,' said she, 'I should answer any one else with a look. But you, since you are almost a father to Monsieur de Camps, you I will ask what you would think of a woman who, in reply to your question, should say, Yes. To confess one's love to the man we love—when he loves us—well, well; when we are sure of being loved for ever, believe me, Monsieur, it is an effort to us and a reward to him; but to any one else!——'

Madame Firmiani did not finish her sentence; she rose, bowed to the good gentleman, and vanished into her private rooms, where the sound of doors opened and shut in succession had language to the ears of the poplar planter.

'Damn it!' said he to himself, 'what a woman! She is either a very cunning hussy or an angel'; and he went down to his hired fly in the courtyard, where the horses were pawing the pavement in the silence. The coachman was asleep, after having cursed his customer a hundred times.

Next morning, by about eight o'clock, the old gentleman was mounting the stairs of a house in the Rue de l'Observance, where dwelt Octave de Camps. If there was in this world a man amazed, it was the young professor on seeing his uncle. The key was in the door, Octave's lamp was still burning; he had sat up all night.

'Now, you rascal,' said Monsieur de Bourbonne, seating himself in an armchair. 'How long has it been the fashion to make fools (speaking mildly) of uncles who have twenty-six thousand francs a year in good land in Touraine? and that, when you are sole heir? Do you know that formerly such relations were treated with respect? Pray, have you any fault to find with me? Have I bungled my business as an uncle? Have I demanded your respect? Have I ever refused you money? Have I shut my door in your face, saying you had only come to see how I was? Have you not the most accommodating, the least exacting uncle in France?

—I will not say in Europe, it would be claiming too much. You write to me, or you don't write. I live on your professions of affection. I am laying out the prettiest estate in the neighbourhood, a place that is the object of envy in all the department; but I do not mean to leave it you till the latest date possible—a weakness that is very pardonable? And my gentleman sells his property, is lodged like a groom, has no servants, keeps no style——'

'My dear uncle——'

'It is not a case of uncle, but of nephew. I have a right to your confidence; so have it all out at once; it is the easiest way, I know by experience. Have you been gambling? Have you been speculating on the Bourse? Come, say, "Uncle, I am a wretch," and we kiss and are friends. But if you tell me any lie bigger than those I told at your age, I will sell my property, buy an annuity, and go back to the bad ways of my youth, if it is not too late.'

'Uncle——'

'I went last night to see your Madame Firmiani,' said the uncle, kissing the tips of all his fingers together. 'She is charming,' he went on. 'You have the king's warrant and approval, and your uncle's consent, if that is any satisfaction to you. As to the sanction of the Church, that I suppose is unnecessary—the sacraments, no doubt, are too costly. Come; speak out. Is it for her that you have ruined yourself?'

'Yes, uncle.'

'Ah! the hussy! I would have bet upon it. In my day a woman of fashion could ruin a man more cleverly than any of your courtesans of to-day. I saw in her a resuscitation of the last century.'

'*Uncle*,' said Octave, in a voice that was at once sad and gentle, 'you are under a mistake. Madame Firmiani deserves your esteem, and all the adoration of her admirers.'

'So hapless youth is always the same!' said Monsieur de Bourbonne. 'Well, well! go on in your own way; tell me all the old stories once more. At the same time, you know, I dare say, that I am no chicken in such matters.'

'My dear uncle, here is a letter which will explain everything,' replied Octave, taking out an elegant letter-case—*her* gift, no doubt. 'When you have read it I will tell you the rest, and you will know Madame Firmiani as the world knows her not.'

'I have not got my spectacles,' said his uncle. 'Read it to me.'

Octave began: 'My dear love——'

'Then you are very intimate with this woman?'

'Why, yes, uncle?'

'And you have not quarrelled?'

'Quarrelled!' echoed Octave in surprise. 'We are married—at Gretna Green.'

'Well, then, why do you dine for forty sous?'

'Let me proceed.'

'Very true. I am listening.'

Octave took up the letter again, and could not read certain passages without strong emotion.

'"My beloved husband, you ask me the reason of my melancholy. Has it passed from my soul into my face, or have you only guessed it? And why should you not? Our hearts are so closely united. Besides, I cannot lie, though that perhaps is a misfortune. One of the conditions of being loved is, in a woman, to be always caressing and gay. Perhaps I ought to deceive you; but I would not do so, not even if it were to increase or to preserve the happiness you give me—you lavish on me—under which you overwhelm me. Oh, my dear, my love carries with it so much gratitude! And I must love for ever, without measure. Yes, I must always be proud of you. Our glory—a woman's glory—is all in the man she loves. Esteem, consideration, honour, are they not

all his who has conquered everything? Well, and my angel has fallen. Yes, my dear, your last confession has dimmed my past happiness. From that moment I have felt myself humbled through you—you, whom I believed to be the purest of men, as you are the tenderest and most loving. I must have supreme confidence in your still childlike heart to make an avowal which costs me so dear. What, poor darling, your father stole his fortune, and you know it, and you keep it! And you could tell me of this attorney's triumph in a room full of the dumb witnesses of our love, and you are a gentleman, and you think yourself noble, and I am yours, and you are two-and-twenty! How monstrous all through!

'"I have sought excuses for you; I have ascribed your indifference to your giddy youth; I know there is still much of the child in you. Perhaps you have never yet thought seriously of what is meant by wealth, and by honesty. Oh, your laughter hurt me so much! Only think, there is a family, ruined, always in grief, girls perhaps, who curse you day by day, an old man who says to himself every night, 'I should not lack bread if Monsieur de Camps' father had only been an honest man.'"'

'What!' exclaimed Monsieur de Bourbonne, interrupting him, 'were you such an idiot as to tell that woman the story of your father's affair with the Bourgneufs? Women better understand spending a fortune than making one——'

'They understand honesty. Let me go on, uncle!

'"Octave, no power on earth is authorised to garble the language of honour. Look into your conscience, and ask it by what name to call the action to which you owe your riches."'

And the nephew looked at his uncle, who beat his head.

'"I will not tell you all the thoughts that beset me; they can all be reduced to one, which is this: I cannot esteem a man who knowingly soils himself for a sum of

money whether large or small. Five francs stolen at play, or six times a hundred thousand francs obtained by legal trickery, disgrace a man equally. I must tell you all: I feel myself sullied by a love which till now was all my joy. From the bottom of my soul there comes a voice I cannot stifle. I have wept to find that my conscience is stronger than my love. You might commit a crime, and I would hide you in my bosom from human justice if I could; but my devotion would go no further. Love, my dearest, is, in a woman, the most unlimited confidence, joined to I know not what craving to reverence and adore the being to whom she belongs. I have never conceived of love but as a fire in which the noblest feelings were yet further purified—a fire which develops them to the utmost.

"'I have but one thing more to say: Come to me poor, and I shall love you twice as much if possible; if not, give me up. If I see you no more, I know what is left to me to do.

"'But, now, understand me clearly, I will not have you make restitution because I desire it. Consult your conscience. This is an act of justice, and must not be done as a sacrifice to love. I am your wife, and not your mistress; the point is not to please me, but to inspire me with the highest esteem. If I have misunderstood, if you have not clearly explained your father's action, in short, if you can regard your fortune as legitimately acquired—and how gladly would I persuade myself that you deserve no blame—decide as the voice of conscience dictates; act wholly for yourself. A man who truly loves, as you love me, has too high a respect for all the holy inspiration he may get from his wife to be dishonourable.

"'I blame myself now for all I have written. A word would perhaps have been enough, and my preaching instinct has carried me away. So I should like to be scolded—not much, but a little. My dear, between you

and me are not you the Power! You only should detect your own faults. Well, Master mine, can you say I understand nothing about political discussion?"'

'Well, uncle?' said Octave, whose eyes were full of tears.

'I see more writing, finish it.'

'Oh, there is nothing further but such things as only a lover may read.'

'Very good,' said the old man. 'Very good, my dear boy. I was popular with the women in my day; but I would have you to believe that I too have loved; *et ego in Arcadiâ.* Still, I cannot imagine why you give lessons in mathematics.'

'My dear uncle, I am your nephew. Is not that as much as to say that I have made some inroads on the fortune left to me by my father? After reading that letter a complete revolution took place in me, in one instant I paid up the arrears of remorse. I could never describe to you the state in which I was. As I drove my cab to the Bois a voice cried to me, "Is that horse yours?" As I ate my dinner, I said to myself, "Have you not stolen the food?" I was ashamed of myself. My honesty was ardent in proportion to its youth. First I flew off to Madame Firmiani. Ah, my dear uncle, that day I had such joys of heart, such raptures of soul as were worth millions. With her I calculated how much I owed the Bourgneuf family; and I sentenced myself, against Madame Firmiani's advice, to pay them interest at the rate of three per cent. But my whole fortune was not enough to refund the sum. We were both of us lovers enough—husband and wife enough—for her to offer and for me to accept her savings——'

'What, besides all her virtues, that adorable woman can save money!' cried the uncle.

'Do not laugh at her. Her position compels her to some thrift. Her husband went to Greece in 1820, and died about three years ago; but to this day it has been

impossible to get legal proof of his death, or to lay hands on the will he no doubt made in favour of his wife; this important document was stolen, lost, or mislaid in a country where a man's papers are not kept as they are in France, nor is there a Consul. So, not knowing whether she may not some day have to reckon with other and malignant heirs, she is obliged to be extremely careful, for she does not wish to have to give up her wealth as Chateaubriand has just given up the Ministry. Now I mean to earn a fortune that shall be mine, so as to restore my wife to opulence if she should be ruined.'

'And you never told me—you never came to me. My dear nephew, believe me I love you well enough to pay your honest debts, your debts as a gentleman. I am the Uncle of the fifth act—I will be revenged.'

'I know your revenges, uncle; but let me grow rich by my own toil. If you wish to befriend me, allow me a thousand crowns a year until I need capital for some business. I declare at this moment I am so happy that all I care about is to live. I give lessons that I may be no burden on any one.

'Ah, if you could but know with what delight I made restitution. After making some inquiries I found the Bourgneufs in misery and destitution. They were living at Saint-Germain in a wretched house. The old father was manager in a lottery office; the two girls did the work of the house and kept the accounts. The mother was almost always ill. The two girls are charming, but they have learnt by bitter experience how little the world cares for beauty without fortune. What a picture did I find there! If I went to the house as the accomplice in a crime, I came out of it an honest man, and I have purged my father's memory. I do not judge him, uncle; there is in a lawsuit an eagerness, a passion which may sometimes blind the most honest man alive. Lawyers know how to legitimise the most preposterous claims; there are syllogisms in law to humour the errors

of conscience, and judges have a right to make mistakes. My adventure was a perfect drama. To have played the part of Providence, to have fulfilled one of these hopeless wishes: "If only twenty thousand francs a year could drop from heaven!"—a wish we all have uttered in jest; to see a sublime look of gratitude, amazement and admiration take the place of a glance fraught with curses; to bring opulence into the midst of a family sitting round a turf fire in the evening, by the light of a wretched lamp—No, words cannot paint such a scene. My excessive justice to them seemed unjust. Well, if there be a Paradise, my father must now be happy.—As for myself, I am loved as man was never loved before. Madame Firmiani has given me more than happiness; she has taught me a delicacy of feeling which perhaps I lacked. Indeed, I call her Dear Conscience, one of those loving names that are the outcome of certain secret harmonies of spirit. Honesty is said to pay; I hope ere long to be rich myself; at this moment I am bent on solving a great industrial problem, and if I succeed I shall make millions.'

'My boy, you have your mother's soul,' said the old man, hardly able to restrain the tears that rose at the remembrance of his sister.

At this instant, in spite of the height above the ground of Octave's room, the young man and his uncle heard the noise of a carriage driving up.

'It is she! I know her horses by the way they pull up.'

And it was not long before Madame Firmiani made her appearance.

'Oh!' she cried, with an impulse of annoyance on seeing Monsieur de Bourbonne. 'But our uncle is not in the way,' she went on with a sudden smile. 'I have come to kneel at my husband's feet and humbly beseech him to accept my fortune. I have just received from the Austrian Embassy a document proving Firmiani's death.

The paper, drawn up by the kind offices of the Austrian envoy at Constantinople, is quite formal, and the will which Firmiani's valet had in keeping for me is subjoined. —There, you are richer than I am, for you have there,' and tapped her husband's breast, 'treasures which only God can add to.' Then, unable to disguise her happiness, she hid her face in Octave's bosom.

'My sweet niece, we made love when I was young,' said the uncle, 'but now you love. You women are all that is good and lovely in humanity, for you are never guilty of your faults; they always originate with us.'

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